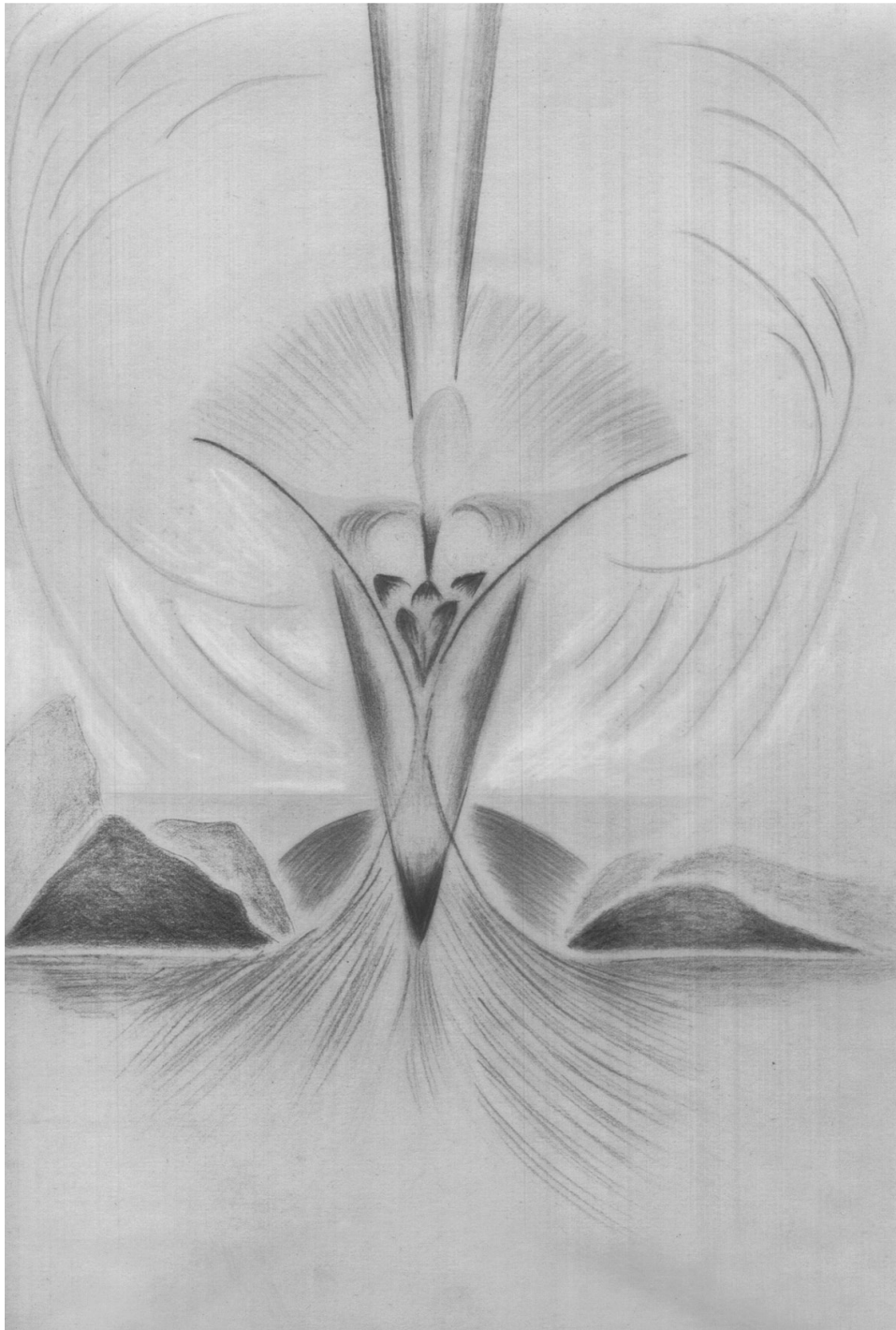


Collaboration

Fall 2012

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 37, No. 2



James Anderson on Psychological perfection •
Rick Lipschutz on the Soul that makes us matter •
John Robert Cornell on the American road trip •
August Timmermans on Freedom in the Integral Yoga •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Book reviews • Poetry • Apropos



About the cover

Title: Creative power of psychic consciousness. This is a greyscale reproduction of a color painting (pencils with watercolor) by Mirajyoti (Sobel) (mjyoti@auroville.org.in) who has lived in Auroville since 1989 and formerly lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It is part of a beautiful collection in soft pastels which has been set to music on a DVD edited by Manohar. The DVD is available from the artist. Mirajyoti is also an editor and she coedited the popular book *The Hierarchy of Minds* with Prem Sobel.

The authors and poets

James Anderson (jamie_randers@yahoo.co.uk) lives in Pondicherry and is part of the journal team of NAMAHA, a journal that examines Integral Health, published by the Sri Aurobindo Society.

Clifford Bax (1886–1962) was a versatile English writer, known particularly as a playwright, a journalist, critic and editor, and a poet, lyricist and hymn writer. For a time he edited a theosophical magazine and had a deep interest in the esoteric.

John Robert Cornell (john.robt@gmail.com) is a writer in Northern California with an abiding interest in the Integral Yoga and the American yoga. He is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Association that publishes Collaboration.

Dian Kiser (ukeforia@yahoo.com) lives in Sacramento, California with her partner, Theresa Boschert. They have been involved in the Sacramento Sri Aurobindo Mother Study Group since 1987. Kiser directs public health programs locally and globally.

Gordon Korstange (gkotangi@gmail.com) lived in Auroville for seven years and was one of a group that initiated the first All-USA-Meeting. He has also been involved in various exchange programs with Auroville over the years.

Bill Leon, Ph.D. (billleon@geoeducation.org) is President of Geo Education & Research (an evaluation consulting firm near Seattle, Washington, USA) and a long-time sadhak who also serves on the board of AVI-USA and supports educational programs for students studying and working in Auroville.

Rick Lipschutz (lipschutzr@gmail.com) is a writer currently engaging with family in Massachusetts. Formerly living in San Francisco, in 2008 and 2009 he gave the talks for Sri Aurobindo's birthday at the Cultural Integration Fellowship center.

August Timmermans (augusttimmermans@yahoo.com) lives in Bangkok, Thailand since 1988 and works for a private university. He lived in India from 1977 to 1985, mainly in Auroville. He has travelled through southeast Asia, especially attracted to cultures based on Buddhism and Hinduism.

Larry Seidlitz (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is currently residing in Auroville, and works as an editor for Collaboration, Auroville Today, as well as freelance on books related to the Integral Yoga.

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From the office of Collaboration

In this issue, we feature a longer essay by James Anderson which is a personal account of practicing the yoga, and three shorter essays by other writers on various topics. James is familiar to our regular readers from previous essays which are invariably penetrating investigations into the real-life experience of practicing the Integral Yoga. Here we learn about the process of going deeper into ourselves to observe our nature, find the presence of the Divine in the psychic being, and from this center, become conscious of and harmonize the various parts of our nature and find the strength to overcome their resistances to change. There are many helpful insights in this essay for tackling the inevitable obstacles that come in the way of true self-giving and change of the outer nature.

The second essay, called “the soul that makes us matter,” is by Rick Lipschutz and it considers parallels between the coming forward of psychic being and the first nuclear explosion. Rick is both an intensive researcher and a meticulous craftsman in his writing, which bring out interesting perspectives on important aspects of the yoga in an artistic and enlivening manner. Here we ponder with the author the power and light that reside in the essence of matter, their transformative possibilities, their relation to the divine immanent in us and all things, and their emergence in our life and the world.

The next essay, titled “American road trip,” is by John Robert Cornell and is a contemplation of our evolutionary journey with our American landscape, physical and cultural, as its living and symbolic backdrop. John Robert has a wonderful sense of our natural American landscape, and weaves its forest trails and sprawling plains into his review of our soul’s evolutionary journey on this physical plane of our infinite existence.

The final essay, written by August Timmermans, considers the importance and role of freedom in the Integral Yoga. After reminding us of recent events in the Integral Yoga community considered by many as an assault upon individual freedom, the essay examines such issues as the differences between religion and yoga, the uniqueness of each person’s spiritual path, and the role of freedom in the soul’s development.

These essays are followed by our Source Material by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The first selection is from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine* on the psychic transformation. This remains one of the most crucial texts on the Integral Yoga, dealing as it does with the first of its three fundamental transformations, the pivotal one which would clear the way for the natural development of the subsequent transformations. The second selection is from the Mother’s talks about finding the psychic being, showing us in practical ways how we can effect this important change in us.

We open this issue of *Collaboration* with a report by Gordon Korstange on the recent All USA Meeting at the Sirius community which was held in June, and two reports on the passing of remarkable members of our Yoga community, Professor Arabinda Basu of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and Nehdia Sameen, a young intellectual with a deeply aspiring soul. For Nehdia, who became known through her many postings on the Auroconf internet discussion group, we have included a selection of her posts in order to reveal something of the great potential she had but did not have the time to fully realize.

In AV Almanac, we have interviews with two Aurovilians, which reveal something of the inner dimension of Auroville life. These interviews were conducted as part of my new work with *Auroville Today*, which I started after moving to Auroville in March. In this section, we also include a report on activities of the Auroville Development Council.

In Book Reviews, we include a review by me of Debashish Banerji’s new book, *The Seven Quartets of Becoming*, a book that examines *The Record of Yoga* in the context of modern Western Philosophy.

Finally, we close with a fine selection of spiritual poetry and apropos quotations.

Collaboration patrons needed

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About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current members: Lynda Lester, president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; and Margaret Phanes. *Collaboration* volunteers include Vishnu Eschner and Lucie Seidlitz.

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

All-USA-Meeting 2012

by Gordon Korstange

From 21-24 June 2012 the AUM was held at the Sirius Community in Shutesbury, Massachusetts. The theme of the gathering was the history and current status of Auroville exchange and volunteer programs: roots and branches.

Sirius was founded in 1978 by “former members of the Findhorn Community in Scotland wishing to establish a similar community in their American homeland. Its foundation is spiritual, but in a non-sectarian manner that allows for each person to find their own way to the heart of all beingness and reality.” (website). Its focus is ecological with unique buildings made from local wood, extensive organic gardens and solar and wind generated power.

Several Aurovilians came to Sirius with the 1988-89 Merriam Hill exchange program which connected the intentional communities of Findhorn, Arcosanti, and Auroville. In the years that followed other exchange programs came into being that brought college students to learn in Auroville, such as PeaceTrees, Geo-Commons, Antioch New-England Teacher Exchange, the University of Washington semester abroad, and Living Routes which was begun by a member of Sirius.

On the first evening, Bryan Walton presented a slide show on the early days of Auroville, which brought back vividly the conditions under which the community began with the constant presence of treeless red earth as its medium and photos of individuals determined to overcome those conditions.

The next morning, Gordon Korstange organized some theatre games to connect and enliven the attendees. This was followed by an introduction to and tour of Sirius by Bruce Davidson, one of its founding members. In the afternoon, there was a panel discussion on Auroville’s organization by several visiting Aurovilians, including Carel Thieme, Priya Sundaravalli, Bindu Mohanty and Audrey Wallace-Taylor. Audrey also gave a public program on Auroville in the nearby city of Northampton, Massachusetts.

On the third day the history of several exchange programs was the focus. Suzanne MacDonald discussed Merriam Hill Center’s work in creating and nurturing educational programs addressing environmental and social problems, and building bridges between innovative communities and mainstream society. Bruce Kantner talked about Geo-Commons, a study abroad program focusing on approaches for sustainable living being fostered by Merriam Hill and the University of New Hampshire. Brenda Johnson spoke about the Antioch New England Teacher Exchange program between Antioch and Auroville. Daniel Greenberg and Bindu Mohanty of Living Routes discussed this study abroad program which has been bringing students from various colleges to learn in Auroville each year. Bill Leon and Jean



Eisle of the University of Washington described (via Skype) their study abroad program that led to the students’ construction of a dormitory in Auroville’s International Zone.

This was followed by two presentations from Meghan Keil and Deborah Howland-Murray who, through connections to Heidi Watts of Antioch New England, have been teaching at the Aikyam School in Auroville. This highlighted the possibilities for volunteering that are available for individuals ready to work on their own in Auroville.

With the help of Foundation for World Education scholarship money, a number of recent Living Routes students attended the AUM. Their fresh observations about their experiences in Auroville, which concluded the morning, were highly appreciated by other attendees.

The afternoon brought a “roots” panel of representatives from AVI-USA, the Foundation for World Education, the East-West Center in Los Angeles, Lodi Ashram, and Matagiri. This was followed by Miriam Belov’s workshop, “Ecohealing,” and a talk-slide show, “The Seven Jewel Centers of the Earth Mother” with Michael Miovic. In the evening Gordon involved the group with “Poetry Alive” and Paula Murphy with storytelling.

The AUM concluded on Sunday morning with a Skype visual call to Auroville which included some of those who had been in the exchange program with Sirius in 1988-89. Bindu then presented on how SAVI, the Auroville group that coordinates volunteer activity, manages the increasing number of individuals who come to work there. SAVI can be reached at study@auroville.org.in and the Auroville website has a description of their services. Finally, a staff member of Living Routes, Ethan Hirsch-Tauber, spoke about his experiences at the recent Rio+20 conference on global warming in Brazil.

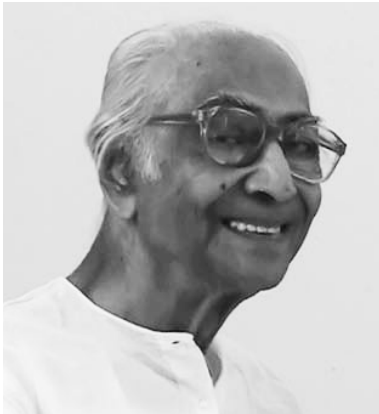
Although there were many presentations ample time was given to leisurely meals, walks in the Sirius woods, “Awareness Through the Body” with Aloka, hatha yoga, theater games and pranayama. The Sirius kitchen provided healthful vegetarian food.

With its focused agenda on Auroville and student/volunteer exchange and its unique setting in an spiritual ecovillage, the 2012 AUM highlighted the way in which this annual gathering can both nourish its members and inform their visions.



The passing of Professor Arabinda Basu¹

One of the great lights of the integral yoga left his body in Pondicherry on 3 July 2012 at the age of 93. Prof. Arabinda Basu was a great intellect, sophisticated and quick with a fine sense of humor. But more importantly he was a sincere seeker with a rich inner life. He was generous and responsive but also had a divine discontent and insight which did not suffer fools or pretense without comment. He was instrumental in introducing Dr. Judith Tyberg (Jyotipriya) to Sri Aurobindo's writings which led to the founding of the East West Cultural Center in Los Angeles. A recent collection of his essays: *Sri Aurobindo, The Poet, Yogi and Philosopher*, edited by Indrani Sanyal, was recently published by Jadavpur University, Kolkata.



Arabinda Basu's contact with Sri Aurobindo Ashram began through Dilip Kumar Roy in 1938 during a period of inner crisis. Upon receiving a blessings packet from the Mother along her comments, he felt something happening to him. He continued to correspond with Roy and on 9 April 1941 he arrived at Pondicherry. He was introduced to Dr. Nirodbaran who later be-

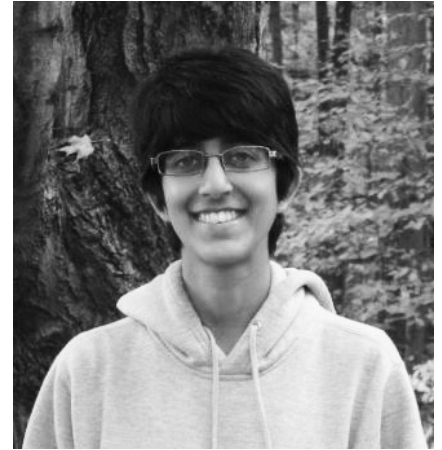
came the channel of communication between Sri Aurobindo and him. He had his first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo on 15 August 1941. In 1943 he wrote to Sri Aurobindo requesting to become an inmate of the Ashram, but Sri Aurobindo wrote back saying, "I've shown your letter to the Mother. We both agree that you should see a little more of life before settling here." These three words "before settling here" convinced him that some day he would indeed become an inmate of Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

After completing his education, Arabinda Basu joined the Benares Hindu University as a professor. In the early 1950s, he joined the Durham University of England as a professor where he taught for 15 years. He returned to India in 1967 and asked the Mother whether he could now return to India permanently and she consented. He arrived in Pondicherry to stay on 1 January 1968. He became an inmate of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and joined the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education as a professor. He served as the Editor of the yearly philosophical magazine *Gavasena*. He was also an eloquent speaker who was invited quite often to speak on the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

¹Thanks to Julian Lines and the *Matagiri Newsletter*, and Anurag Banerjee and <http://overmanfoundation.wordpress.com>.

Remembering Nehdia

On 15 June 2012, Nehdia Sameen passed away suddenly of a brain hemorrhage; she was just 29. Nehdia, or Ned as she was called by her friends, became well-known and well-loved in the Sri Aurobindo community due in part to her frequent



and insightful postings on the online discussion forum, auroconf, as well as her visits to Sri Aurobindo centers and her attendance at All USA Meetings. She had a rare combination of personal warmth, great intellect, deep devotion, a passion for progress, and a wisdom far beyond her age. Born in Pakistan, she completed her bachelor's degree (Honours) in computer science at the Lahore University of Management Sciences, and on a Fulbright scholarship, a master's degree in psychology at New York University. She was currently a Ph.D. student at Simon Fraser University. Below we reproduce some of her fine postings on the auroconf discussion forum.

I've been a lurker on this list for a while, and thought I should finally post an intro and let others know who I am. My name is Nehdia, often shortened to "Ned" by close friends, and I'm currently based in Islamabad, Pakistan. I come from a typical Sunni Muslim background, and the story of my journey to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is a really entertaining one, which I might share if people are interested!

I intend to go for an academic career in psychology, and one of my interests is to investigate how the findings of neuroscience, cognitive psychology and neurotheology fit into Sri Aurobindo's message. I'm leaving this year for a Master's in Psychology at New York University, so hopefully, starting August, I'll be in New York City for a couple of years and will have more privacy and freedom to practice my sadhana. My long-term plan is to move to Canada with my girlfriend, and hopefully with the security and peace of mind I'll get when I'm based in Canada, I'll be able to speak more fearlessly and openly in Pakistani intellectual circles about some of my more radical ideas! Besides, it'll make it easier to travel to India some day. :-)

I've been enjoying reading people's thoughts on this mailing list. I sense a great amount of sincerity in this group. I hope I can be a valuable member and also make new friends here.

Take care, everyone! (4/29/07)

The topic of Islam is a very important one in my life, but my understanding and perception of it changes day by day. I have to say at least from my own experience: the Shakti is working as



quickly and totally and harmoniously as she can to help everyone. The effects of Mother's Force have been spilling not only into my life but into the lives of my friends, my sisters and my parents. I didn't see the patterns before, but now I'm starting to see them.

I do have some preliminary intuitions and ideas on which direction this could take. I mentioned the symbol of Ruh-i-Al-lah as being a direct reference to the Mother, the Shakti, in the Quran, as well as the Sufi idea of the Khatun-i-Qiyamat, or the Lady of the Resurrection, which I think is also a reference to Mother. There are other manifestations of the Feminine in Islam also (for instance, Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatimah was also possibly a symbol—she is treated as such by Shi'ites), but they have to be dug out and brought into the Light—like all patriarchal religions, Islam has sought to hide and cover up the Feminine, but I sense that it is now very much emerging. I see it in all the different traditionalist, reformist and progressive movements in the Islamic world.

Why has Islam become so problematic? My sense is that Prophet Muhammad was a real warrior in the vital, a true yogi of the vital. Desert cultures were ruled by harsh lower vital forces, hence you have laws and rules like stoning to death, etc. Muhammad must have had to contend with some pretty terrible forces and the fact that he managed to unite the warring Arab tribes into a nation (and in 23 years, no less!) shows he must have had a really powerful vital. Sri Aurobindo compares him to Arjuna in the Gita and calls him a "yogishrestha." He must have embodied all those wonderful qualities of the higher vital planes—chivalry, willingness to protect the weak, courage to challenge oppressors, gladness and largeness, powers of social organization, and so on. The sacralization of sexuality in Islam also shows it was kind of a Tantric religion, it must have really brought back beauty from the higher vital planes, the appreciation of physical sensation, and so on.

But I think the problem with revelations from the vital realms is that they eventually get corrupted by adverse forces fairly easily (because this is just the nature of the vital and because Prakriti is so inert and passive)—*unless* the Shakti is constantly present to purify the vital and make it plastic and dynamic and keep raising it to higher planes of consciousness. And I think the Sufis later on figured this out and contacted the Shakti (especially Ibn al-Arabi—who represents the heights of Moorish Spain—in whose writings the Shakti-power clearly shows up), but all this knowledge has been buried for centuries.

Sri Aurobindo said that the Islamic revelation was eventually corrupted by the undeveloped races into whose hands it fell—again, recall what I said about the desert landscape and culture and about how the races at that time and place must have been vitally crude.

Someone well-established in the psychic—having opened up all the chakras and having established the peace solidly—could certainly read the Quran through the lens of the Supramental Force and reinterpret the symbolism in a way that is meaningful for today's world, thereby being a vessel through which the occult

formations needed to remold Islamic culture would be set up.

... I do think that a reconciliation between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh would do wonders for improving the state of Islamic culture in the world—I think you're spot-on there.

But all of this will take a long, long time to have any effect. Look at Christianity—it's in a much better position to participate in the Supramental Transformation, and although superficially change is happening (e.g. the Emerging Church movement, etc.), there's too much polarization and reactivity.

I think Sri Aurobindo put it really well when he said: "When all is said, Love and Force together can save the world eventually, but not Love only or Force only. Therefore Christ had to look forward to a second advent and Mahomed's religion, where it is not stagnant, looks forward through the Imams to a Mahdi."

Prophet Muhammad represents vital Force and Christ represents the Love aspect of the Mother. Only when vital force is purified and transmuted by the Divine Shakti and when force and power bow down to the harmonies of Love, can true change happen.

It's going to take time. Nothing worth doing but staying centered in the Mother's presence. (9/1/08)

My whole life I have struggled with breaking out of cycles of dominance and submission. In some ways I have been dominant (e.g. mentally) and in other ways I have been submissive (e.g. vitally and physically).

The message has come to me clearly. If you want reconciliation between the genders, races, nations, people of different sexual orientations, etc. etc., bring out the psychic. This is the *ONLY* thing that can break the cycles of dominance and submission on all the planes of reality once and for all. It is the only thing that can arrange and harmonize the life-force so that we stop creating oppression. (10/4/08)

Just sharing my own perspective here: I find Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to be quite irreverent in many of their writings (especially in their dialogues and writings). Also, Sri Aurobindo uses all sorts of erotic metaphors in a lot of his poetry that would probably offend many puritanical traditional Vedantists. He *was* the sort who wanted to enjoy all parts of the being, including the vital, but only at the highest and most spiritual and purified levels—neither he nor the Mother are ever crude.

And speaking for myself, no topic is taboo for me. My knowledge of human sexuality is probably encyclopedic, but that knowledge, together with my own experiences, has actually served to strengthen my conviction that it's best to slowly transition toward celibacy. I don't feel that irreverence, openness to information, knowledge, etc. is incompatible with the integral yoga.

Personally, I find lots of things in left-hand Tantra a bit disturbing and I would imagine that they are occultly quite dangerous for the ordinary person.



Also, bear in mind that strictly speaking integral yoga is a synthesis of Vedanta and Tantra. I've seen Sri Aurobindo referring to it as a yoga that uses the methods of Vedanta to attain the aims of Tantra. So it's the best of both worlds: a very safe and stabilizing spiritual practice with the widest possible goal of taking account of *and* transforming the embodied life. (4/30/10)

But I wasn't saying, ..., you should personally go lead sweatshop laborers to freedom. I'm simply saying that dehumanizing work conditions ARE a reality, and it IS difficult for ordinary people to remain emotionally stable in those conditions, let alone to experience spiritually meaningful lives. Most workers in such conditions will remain where they are for their entire lives because there are few avenues through which they can experience upward social mobility, and because being in those conditions will lower the consciousness of most people anyway (save for the few rare souls that are already highly developed).

Personal transformation in individuals AND changes in people's outer circumstances and societies in general have to be happening simultaneously and both are needed at this stage in human evolution. I thought this was Sri Aurobindo's whole point—that both inner and outer changes are needed. Some people focus too much on personal transformation in individuals, putting the responsibility entirely on the individual, and some people focus too much on changing the outer circumstances and put the entire onus on the environment. But I think it's obvious that a balance is needed. (7/22/10)

Yep, exactly. And that's the thing ... it's all so impersonal. The minute you forget all this sin and virtue nonsense and start looking at things impersonally, it all starts to make a lot more sense—how the Mother is rearranging the lines of development, the energies, the forms, to build a new creation so magnificent that it can barely be imagined at this point. And then you participate ... you speed up the manifestation ... you release love and creative energy and sweetness and peace into the environment and to all the people who are so hungry for it.

And eventually—maybe not exactly when WE want—but eventually, the thing that seemed so scary, so horrible, so ugly, begins to look like exactly what needed to happen at that point in time. (12/2/2010)

The important thing is that when this happens, when you really feel the psychic rescuing like this: cling to the Mother and beg her to never, ever let you fall again. Do everything in your power to keep yourself safe from profane influences—use all your mental, vital, physical powers to protect yourself. As long as you do your best (or heck, even a sufficient fraction of your best), Mother is guaranteed to handle the rest for you and keep you protected. (12/3/2010)

I was thinking of a concept that Buckminster Fuller, the great inventor, came up with: Tensegrity or tensional integrity ... the

optimal and dynamic arrangement of forces of tension and compression that allows you to build very, very complex structures that are nevertheless remarkably stable.

What if Mother is building up a scaffolding—the World-stair to the New Creation, as it were—that incorporates tensegrity on every plane and level?

At my stage in the yoga where the Work is in the vital, I'm trying to imagine a kind of emotional tensegrity in all my relationships with everything in the world ... a dynamic push and pull that allows me to harmonize with many different kinds of people from many different backgrounds, with many different moral views, many different degrees of development on different dimensions ... the dance of Divine Love that helps me open up the heart-center to as many people as possible without ever losing my own psychic center and inner integrity. Wow, what a tremendous possibility! (12/3/10)

It also looks to me like a lot of young people are discovering their inner nobility and choosing to act on it. The old sex, drugs and rock'n'roll culture was a crude and reckless beginning and people are outgrowing it. Sixpence None The Richer, a band I used to listen to when I was younger, has been singing more spiritual songs lately. Here's a new song they've come up with:

"Let everything that has breath ... praise the Lord" [available on YouTube]

I hope and pray that we are heading toward the realization of Sri Aurobindo's [five] dreams...

I should add that I'm also starting to see the reconciliation of the sexes—men and women and even those who are intersexed and neither men nor women—as envisioned by the Mother on the horizon. The life-forces are getting transmuted.

I was sharing a prayer with Rohini on chat the other day that, God willing, we may be living in an era in which not only will Love be delivered from the Cross and placed on the Throne, but in which Force will be delivered from the Furnace and the Torture-cell and placed in the Heart-chamber. For Love is the best foundation for Force. (12/4/10)

Being a little abstract, but the way I see it—it's up to each and everyone to figure it out for himself. And a constant effort on this leads one to a point, where one starts seeing a harmony in one's vision and everyone else's.

... I feel you've hit on a very profound insight here. Increasingly I'm starting to feel as if everybody's personal yoga is complementary to everybody else's. If only we could just open up at the heart-level and connect through that, then the mind and vital could mesh much more harmoniously and our collective evolution would be a lot more organic and dynamically interdependent without creating false attachments. We would stop giving each other blows and shocks based on apparent contradictions between personal perceptions of morality or truth, and the paths would get straightened out for everyone. (12/4/2010)



AV almanac

“We are all part of something we don’t fully grasp”

An interview with Deepti who has been involved for many years with education in Auroville and at present teaches in Last School

Interviewed by Larry Seidlitz

Reprinted from Auroville Today, June/July 2012

What was it that led you to come to Auroville?

I don’t have a sense of ever choosing Auroville. I discovered Sri Aurobindo thanks to my parents who brought me here just after I had passed my school exams. My father, Krishna Tewari, had had a profound experience, as a senior officer in the Eastern Command during the Bangladesh war, and he brought the family to Pondicherry to see if this was the source. So Sri Aurobindo came into my life at the most opportune moment when I had finished one thing and I had to decide what to do next. Coming to Pondicherry, having Mother’s darshan, 40 years ago in 1972, was like an answer to everything I had asked. It gave my life its direction.

Growing up in India, I grew up exposed to a living spirituality. But the answers provided were not satisfying. The spiritual aim seemed to be all about finding a solution outside of life. Then you come to Sri Aurobindo and he says that a life divine is not only a legitimate aspiration of a humanity that is a transitional species, but this divine life is an evolutionary inevitability on earth. This was just marvelous. He spoke to the kind of mind I had developed; a mentality that was encouraged to question things.

When I came to Sri Aurobindo, I was still a teenager. My sense was of coming to Pondicherry to give myself to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and there was no further idea beyond that. It seemed to evolve somewhat inevitably that as a young energetic person, I would move to Auroville rather than stay on at the Ashram. There is something very wonderful about the Ashram, but the future, the energy of self-expression into an unknown tomorrow seemed much more compatible with Auroville.

I came to stay permanently in 1975. This was the time of the problems with the Sri Aurobindo Society; so I landed in the middle of a kind of “revolutionary” Auroville. It would seem I came to Auroville because an essential part of me was intended to be a part of a collective realisation. Something within that has chosen to make an attempt to disappear as an individual ego and participate in an unfolding at this present moment in evolutionary time:



the creation of a collective consciousness capable of holding the power of the future visioned by Sri Aurobindo’s action.

What does it mean to you to be an Aurovilian, in the deeper sense of the term?

My understanding today is that we are all part of something that we don’t fully grasp. None of the realizations of the past count in that wholeness of which each of us constitutes one element. We have entered a virgin forest; a territory never explored before as a species. In Auroville, we are part of something that is still to be created. Our individual work is to remove all shadows in ourselves. Mother says in the Agenda: one must stand in the Light of the Supreme Consciousness without casting a shadow. That is the demand of this new consciousness. The shadow is the individual egoism, and this ego is present right down to the most material physical. Hopefully, we have made a start on a very long journey. It’s not as if this change is something we can bring about by our own effort. In Sri Aurobindo’s yoga you are called upon to give yourself completely; the yoga will be done in you by the new consciousness creating the future.

It seems to me that everything Auroville presents itself as—an eco-village, sustainable on all planes, an international collective experiment evolving new forms of education, economy, governance—all of these are just means to that one end, which is to provide a material platform upon which that future evolutionary possibility can manifest.

What kinds of effect has the community had on your personal development, how has it shaped you?

One of the things Mother says that I have used as a mantra for my own growth, is that when a blow comes, look within and see what the weakness is that invited the blow; then the blow becomes a bliss. I would say that in one way, living in this community has been difficult. When I first came to stay, I came from a background that did not experience the 1960s the way Aurovilians from the West did. I grew up in an armed forces family, in an India subjected to three wars through my school



years. Patriotism, love of your country, devotion, dedication, high ethical standards: these were the kinds of heroic values that I had around me. Then I landed up in Auroville, which was very counter culture, with an atmosphere of revolt and a breaking of social and moral patterns. So it felt a little like I was hit on the head. I realized that I had been put by some deepest inner choice in a place where you have to shatter the mould: the mould of your ideals, whether they be mental ideas, moral-ethical ideas, ideas of aesthetics, or even your ideas of spirituality. In Auroville one has not been allowed the sense of settling into any kind of poise—the really good thing about Auroville is that it peels away all these protective skins. This can be painful or very positive; it depends on your consciousness at any given moment. I feel that Auroville has been dismantling me in many ways on many fronts; and one must embrace the process to be in a state of wellbeing. When you have freely chosen to subject yourself to this experiment, then you have no one else to complain to!

What is your perception of the community spirit of Auroville?

I feel that there are a sufficient number of old-time Aurovilians with whom I seem to share a kind of inner bond which completely transcends outer connections: we are part of something inwardly that we have only just begun to touch and grasp to some extent. As for work, I have been associated long with a group of people, and it is marvelous to work with them. There are times when, with other people, you don't quite comprehend what they are doing or from where their action arises. But on the whole it works just fine if you don't put labels on it. You say, okay, we're part of something together; it's a journey into a conscious collectivity we are making together. And one accepts not to understand!

Also I think Auroville spoils you for other situations. It has a unique flavor and taste constituted of this absolute freedom that Mother made the core of the experiment. The only pressure that really works here is the pressure of consciousness, which may depend upon your transparency before the forces of the future. Such an atmosphere, such an intensity of collective acceleration you don't find anywhere else in the world.

One of my senses of the new consciousness is that it is a consciousness of absolute harmony and equality. So if there is disharmony within or without, then you are certainly not in the new consciousness. We will touch the soul of Auroville when we touch all those highest truths that humanity has aspired for, whether it is Supreme Beauty, Supreme Good, Supreme Truth, Supreme Harmony, and Supreme Perfection.

The trajectory of Auroville is aimed very high. At the present point, I don't see either in my consciousness or in the collective consciousness, the élan that would allow us to evolve from our caterpillar human nature into the butterfly of the future even in a generation or two. So while my faith in arriving has solidified, so has my understanding of how far one has to travel. But Sri Aurobindo says it is the 'hour of the unexpected' and the last word on Auroville rests in hands of that unforeseen Grace that created it!

“To be an Aurovilian is to be who you really are”

An interview with Shakti who is an artist

Interviewed by Larry Seidlitz

Reprinted from Auroville Today, June/July 2012

What was it that led you to come to Auroville?

The first thing which touched me so much when I knew that Auroville existed was the possibility to have answers to the questions I always had. Questions like Why are we here? Why is there this life? Why is there this creation? Nobody could give me the answers.

Then my brother and I started reading some literature. We found Sri Aurobindo's *Bases of Yoga* translated into Russian on typewritten copies, not yet published, and we started reading it. We also read the Bhagavad Gita translated into Russian. It gave me answers but also more questions. But I felt, yes, something is there. We couldn't realize yet what Sri Aurobindo was writing about until later. Then *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness* by Satprem was published in Russian and it was a big boon. It was like butter and honey on my heart. Then I knew what I was searching for.

Then in the *Pravda* newspaper I read an article about Auroville, that a place existed where everybody could live, and it didn't belong to anyone in particular but to the world as a whole. The correspondent for the newspaper said that all nations were there except for Russians. I started dreaming about this place with my girlfriend, and we would talk for hours, how can we go to this place? I thought I would give everything I had just to get there.

Then my brother went to Pune University and disappeared for one year. I was stuck in the Ukraine with many responsibilities. Then he phoned me after one year and said, “I am here, you can come.” I couldn't come right away, but finally I came, alone, in 1994.

I had a strong preconception of what Auroville would be. For example, I was sure that all the Aurovilians would be going to the Matrimandir in the morning at 7 o'clock for meditation. (laughs) What I saw and what I imagined were quite different. But what I felt when I first came was trembling golden particles in the air entering into our car and into our bodies. It was vibrating, something alive, amazing. I was so touched. And when I saw my brother Vladimir and where he lived and worked, I loved everything about it. I had seen the red earth in my dream. Everything was incredibly beautiful. At the same time, I loved going to the Samadhi. It took me some time to collect all the different parts of myself. But I had found my dream and my aim in life: I came for Auroville.



What does it mean to you to be an Aurovilian, in the deeper sense of the term?

I like what Kireet Joshi said once: all of us who live here signed an agreement with the Divine long ago. Sometimes we don't want to do it, we cover it up, but we signed that agree-

ment. To be Aurovilian is very different from being a Pondicherrian or Ashramite. To be Aurovilian is to be responsible to yourself in front of the Divine, but not as a heavy burden. It comes the more you adventure within. You shouldn't be afraid to try new things. It means to have a straight connection with the Divine. You have your own unique connection with the Divine and with all the other people who are living here as well.

It is a miracle what is happening here. We are working on ourselves and on each other. We are building the place where human unity has to happen. It is still far away, but it exists on some level. I feel it very well: it is not just a dream anymore. To be an Aurovilian is to be who you really are, more and more who you are, and to feel the Divine in each other and in yourself.

There was something which Sri Aurobindo said which I very much take as my guide to being in community: collaboration, empathy, and goodwill. Without these, no spiritual anarchy is possible. We have all the problems, economic, political etc. To solve them, it is very important for all these three to be together.

Can you say more about how your experience in Auroville has shaped you or changed you?

If I wouldn't have left Ukraine I would have died, I would have suffocated. My life was empty.

When I came here, my life started. I learned how to cycle. I learned all kinds of sports. I learned painting. I started playing music. It gave me all the possibilities to be what I am in my nature, and the instrumentation that my soul demands. I am full of joy to be here. I started seeing nature. I go to Matrimandir every morning at 5:30, and then the sun rises—bright orange, red. That's how Auroville is. It is very beautiful.

Are there spiritual practices which keep you centered and grounded here?

To be here is already a spiritual practice. If I was not looking for the spirit in myself and in everything, I wouldn't live here.

As for practices, whatever we do is dedicated to the ideal of the place—you live for the Divine, you give yourself to the Divine. If sometimes you do not remember in your outer mind, it is still in the background of your life. It is one decision we have made. I also do meditation and Iyengar Yoga regularly. It helps to keep the body in good shape, because the spirit wants a healthy body.

What is your view of the community spirit in Auroville?

The community is like a constellation of stars: we are all connected in some strange figure. But there are some people who carry the spirit more strongly, who are more bright and who radiate the light to others. I think that the spirit is moving in and among us and breaking forth in people. In some people, it is so solid, a completely different vibration. So when someone is in their presence, something is going to happen to them. They start to open more and more to that vibration.

Town Development Council report

Reprinted from Auroville Today, August 2012

The TDC/L'Avenir recently made a report of its activities to the Governing Board. Among other things they mentioned they had made a layout for the Residential Zone (sectors 1 and 2) which foresees a population of 5,000 people. This had been prepared taking into consideration the foot-print of the Galaxy and also the physical ground realities, the morphology of the land and the water catchment area. They have also been taking steps to protect the Green Belt from unwanted development. These include preparing Green Belt Land Use Regulations, commissioning a survey of the existing land use in the Green Belt, including land not owned by Auroville, and drawing up a working paper for a regional plan to be presented to the local authorities ... to safeguard the Green Belt.

Meanwhile, there are three new projects in the International Zone financed by a Government of India grant: the Center for Indian Studies, the Tamil Heritage Center, and the Auroville Language Lab. One more project, Cité Universitaire (a student hostel for 150 people), has been approved for site permission. A plan for the International Zone was approved in 2009 by L'Avenir, but it is felt that some review is required in order to keep consideration of certain ground realities, and to reassess the concept and the space for the national pavilions in order to give more space for institutional development and centers of excellence in the area.

The TDC is also studying the possibility of developing a collection/storage/treatment system of surface water—one of whose features will be a Lake around Matrimandir and its gardens (as envisioned by the Mother). Infrastructural work for an interconnected water distribution system in the Residential and Industrial Zones has been started using funds from the Government of India.



Essays

Psychological perfection

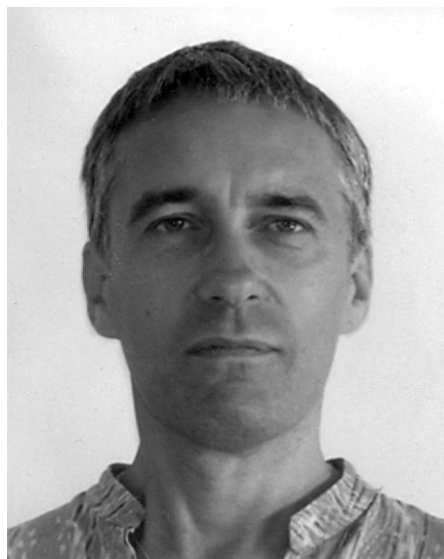
by James Anderson

One doesn't need to be in medical practice to know that 'psychological perfection' is a colossal aim. Man has searched for it throughout the centuries and, I suppose, only a few have come close to attaining it. A science has painstakingly evolved to locate the key to its secrets. Many of us though, if we're honest, prefer to hide away in our 'comfort zones,' "afraid of being lost in that light and freedom."¹

But I do believe that the search is very necessary. I don't think one can move even an inch forward on the path of yoga before some sort of internal harmony is installed. Even outside it, some sort of psychological equilibrium is certainly imperative. For me, it has become very clear that the inside must always be addressed first. If one aspires for wholeness one must indeed look at the whole: I feel that it is futile trying to address the surface first. The inner state clearly determines the frontal form. Indeed, in my case now, my body's well-being seems to be entirely reliant on the condition inside.

Perhaps there is no great secret after all. I have found that this shift to inner health can only happen as soon as I stand in my truth. That is easier said than done and, to date, I don't think I've ever managed to settle on that threshold. And what, after all, is it that induces this state? Experience has brought me precious glimpses and, at such moments, everything seems to fall magically into place.

As I enquire and probe a little more inside, I am able to see that I am comprised of many segments. It is a complex and fascinating world. There is quite a mixture but these parts, in the end, definitely comprise some sort of whole. But what is it that creates this whole? Look-



ing from another angle, I then realize too that I am nothing but a speck amidst an immense backdrop of Oneness. But, at the same time, I also see that this speck can somehow spread itself over the entire universe! This sort of process is so alien to our usual nature. I don't think our instruments are prepared or equipped to naturally embrace such truths. So something new has to take over. Something new has to help us expand and become vast.

To find it, I believe, points the way to wisdom and true fulfilment. Inside all of us, I believe, is a hidden yearning to discover this truth. For some of us, it may take centuries to unfold but something very persistent in all of us aspires to make this prodigious discovery.

The five psychological perfections

The Mother gave the champak flower the name of Psychological perfection. It is very beautiful and fragrant; the shrub is very common in these parts but seems to grow all over the world. The flower has five petals and the Mother, in giving its significance, also describes the five attributes that we need to move forward on this path. In concluding a talk, She summarized these perfections as follows:

So here's my proposal: we put surrender first, at the top of the list, that is, we accept what Sri Auro-

bindo has said—that 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, and we say that these perfections are:

Sincerity or Transparency
Faith or Trust (Trust in the Divine, naturally)
Devotion or Gratitude
Courage or Aspiration
Endurance or Perseverance.

One form of endurance is faithfulness, faithfulness to one's resolution—being faithful. One has taken a resolution, one is faithful to one's resolution. This is endurance.²

Armed with these perfections, She says, one can march confidently forward. Clearly, these kind of virtues will admirably equip man in whatever context he finds himself. We have the Mother to thank for removing the distinctions between yoga and life: there is only consciousness after all. These perfections were, moreover, never intended to be rigid. The Mother said that "every time I give it to someone, they are not always the same psychological perfections. That depends on people's needs. Even to the same person I may give at different times different psychological perfections; so it's not fixed."³

So I truly believe that the Mother gives each one of us the necessary materials to nourish our own individual growth. I feel that She provides us with the necessary attributes to create our own unique psychological perfection. This perfection is clearly much more than an amalgamation of individual virtues. For me, a psychological perfection will only come when I am able to live in my truth. For me, this perfection is our individual truth and it provides the key to our inner wholeness and health. When we live in our truth we simply become whole and being 'whole' obviously implies that nothing is missing.

As we begin to live in our truth, we



take the stage in this wonderful play of divine multiplicity. Each individual truth is like a perfect crystal, unique in shape but identical in essence. Each one of us has our individual truth. I look upon it as a universal law. So to live in your truth means you are acting in consonance with the rhythm of the universe.

Preparation

However lofty the aim, I believe that this perfection can be always more than a mere ideal. I'd like it to become my living reality. This is clearly a work of preparation: every detail of our inner nature has to be observed and yet, at the same time, a vision of the whole must be maintained. I've had to proceed from very rudimentary beginnings. Indeed, I find I am so often obliged to retreat and start all over again. Certain negative patterns have the habit of continually re-emerging and sometimes appear to wipe out any work done beforehand. But in truth, as Sri Aurobindo says, no progress is entirely wasted and there is always a valuable lesson to emerge from our most glaring defeat. There even seems to be a purpose and a plan behind every lapse and fall. If we allow it and if we truly surrender, the work unfolds before us and I believe that a secret hand will give us the necessary experience to progress and grow. A new way has to be found to foster this growth and without growth, our inner psychology will simply wither and die.

Control

The Mother's choice of words often fascinates me. Initially, looking at it first almost made me freeze, but as I went deeper into the significance behind, something truly shifted inside. In common usage, the term implies an element of coercion and enforcement. That, I guess, is why the word is often used in reference to the mind. The ordinary mind seems to understand a lot about coercion and enforcement. In fact, that's how it usually gets its bidding done. But here, authentic control, according to the Mother, implies

mastery and this mastery is both free and spontaneous. That is clearly not the province of the ordinary mind: it is the domain of the soul.

To me, the transfer invariably comes in an atmosphere of peace. It often arrives unexpectedly and the change can be very subtle. I need to be attentive to be conscious of this transition. So often the changeover catches me unawares. It would be true to say that I find it generally coming in brief visits. When such a shift does come forward, I find it is helpful to make good use of it because it can disappear as quietly as it entered in the first place.

The nature of the soul is to harmonize. When it does step forward, everything seems to find its true function and place. The soul has the ability to cement all internal divisions. Without our secret master life would be chaos. We may not always appreciate this, but I believe it is true. Indeed, on several occasions, his quiet voice has pulled me back from the brink of collapse and ruin.

The soul helps us expand and grow; to live in it brings a vastness and to stay there can bring an eternal Delight. So I know of no better panacea for psychological health. That is why I believe that the future psychology lies not in the mind but in the soul. What is the sense in probing into something so obviously flawed when the source of all perfection is there, sitting inside us? This sort of knowledge can't really be learnt from laboratories or books; it can only come from experience. We have to learn to dive down into our own laboratory to find the truth. That is the only way. We can't be told who or what we are. We have to search our inner cave to find the key to Her Delight.

Looking at oneself

The Mother often says that to find the soul we must, above all, truly want it. It must become the overriding aim of our life, the reason for our existence. Every conceivable moment can be consecrated to this search. Sooner or later, that necessitates a complete shift in orientation.

Gradually, I feel, as we withdraw from the surface we begin to access a much richer life inside. I feel that involves a change of poise and is a matter of practice.

In order to find the soul you must go in this way (gesture of going deep within), like this, draw back from the surface, withdraw deep within and enter, enter, enter, go down, down, down into a very deep hole, silent immobile, and there. There's a kind of... something warm, quiet, rich in substance and very still, and very full, like a sweetness—that is the soul.

And if one is insistent and is conscious oneself, then there comes a kind of plenitude which gives the feeling of something complete that contains unfathomable depths in which, should one enter, one feels that many secrets would be revealed... like the reflection in very peaceful waters of something that is eternal. And one no longer feels limited by time.

One has the feeling of having always been and of being for eternity. "That is when one has touched the core of the soul."⁴

We all know that this search requires a very persistent will. By dedication and patience, we can unravel what Sri Aurobindo terms the 'tegmentums of the soul' so that the truth of our being can step forward. I guess that it is never an instantaneous process; it can take many years. But living and growing are made of many shades and as the psychic being slowly emerges, a greater light starts to radiate throughout the being. It is my impression that only this light can truly sustain us; only this light that can ultimately fulfil the secret yearning that hides away in each one of us. So at first it holds itself back and gradually, through persistent practice, it becomes more evident to our whole nature.

The psychic clearly provides the key to a new harmony inside. Gradually, I begin to find that those warring factions below start to reach some sort of reconcili-



ation. I also start to appreciate that there is something new that induces this change. The discovery provides a totally novel perspective of my identity. I can now start to look at the mind, life and body as mere instruments but not ‘myself’ as my true essence comes to light. This brings a sense of liberation as my individuality becomes less enslaved to the lower nature.

And if the contact has been conscious and complete enough, it liberates you from the bondage of outer form; you no longer feel that you live only because you have a body. That is usually the ordinary sensation of the being, to be so tied to this outer form that when one thinks of ‘myself’ one thinks of the body. That is the usual thing. The personal reality is the body’s reality. It is only when one has made an effort for inner development and tried to find something that is a little more stable in one’s being, that one can begin to feel that this ‘something’ which is permanently conscious throughout all ages and all change, this something must be ‘myself’. But that already requires a study that is rather deep. Otherwise if you think ‘I am going to do this’, ‘I need that’, it is always your body, a small kind of will which is a mixture of sensations, of more or less confused sentimental reactions, and still more confused thoughts which form a mixture and are animated by an impulse, an attraction, a desire, some sort of a will; and all that momentarily becomes ‘myself’—but not directly, for one does not conceive this ‘myself’ as independent of the head, the trunk, the arms and legs and all that moves—it is very closely linked.

It is only after having thought much, seen much, studied much, observed much that you begin to realise that the one is more or less independent of the other and that the will behind can make it either act or not act, and you begin not to

be completely identified with the movement, the action, the realisation—that something is floating. But you have to observe much to see that.

And then you must observe much more to see that this, the second thing that is there, this kind of active conscious will, is set in motion by ‘something else’ which watches, judges, decides and tries to found its decisions on knowledge—that happens even much later. And so, when you begin to see this ‘something else’, you begin to see that it has the power to set in motion the second thing, which is an active will; and not only that, but that it has a very direct and very important action on the reactions, the feelings, the sensations, and that finally it can have control over all the movements of the being—this part which watches, observes, judges and decides.

That is the beginning of control.

When one becomes conscious of that, one has seized the thread, and when one speaks of control, one can know, ‘Ah! yes, this is what has the power of control.’

This is how one learns to look at oneself.⁵

The surface nature

It would be true to say that it has taken a while for these kinds of distinctions to consolidate in my understanding. Even now, when the surface consciousness wrests control, I can see it trying to reinstate itself as the only reality. It can still be a major cause of disruption. The realization that we are, in essence, entirely intact and independent of the outer form is, I guess, a first move forward in inner health. To be a slave to the body is not a life. Indeed, to be a slave to the ordinary mind or vital is not a great deal better. This misplaced sense of identity, however, still occasionally intervenes and at such times I have to carefully recover my steps. In those instances, I simply have to realign

myself. Many patterns from outside reinforce this distorted thinking. This sort of surface thinking adheres to past grooves that obstinately refuse to be effaced. So I must be persistent.

That is why, I suggest, we need to be so awake and conscious. We have to see ourselves as we truly are. But perhaps seeing what we are not can be the first knowledge. It is a little like untying a huge knot. Sometimes this knot can get so entangled we have to call for help. But the Mother is never far away. If we look closely enough we can see that She has established residence in our soul. So to merely witness and observe, if it comes from this true base, is usually sufficient and the arising knowledge produces the necessary shift.

And if we dwell on the surface, we also become more prone to those impacts that continually come to us from outside: it is like a magnet. We lose our protection and shield. The more we live on the surface the more clutter we accumulate: one is liable to become a walking neurosis.

Yoga and change

Life for me got a great deal more intense as soon as I embarked on this yoga. I have found that yoga brings a much greater richness to living; at times every incident seems to be pregnant with significance and meaning. Every action creates a kind of ripple in my being.

Initially at least, I saw myself passing through massive extremes. Outside those precious moments of concentration, installing a state of peace into everyday living proved so problematic. Embracing the surface existence can present many obstacles, particularly when one has concluded that only the inner life has any true substance.

Initially, at least, it seemed there were two worlds. But the ordinary world will never go away! The only solution is for these two worlds to become one: that is, I guess, a fundamental challenge of this path. It would be true to say that the world we see and inhabit is our reflection and creation. We create our own world. Our world can even burst its boundaries



through the entire cosmos if we are able to will it! In yoga, we learn to radiate our truth in whichever world we walk. Once this lesson is absorbed, it will just come down to scenery, admittedly a little pleasant or unpleasant, but not really of much consequence.

But getting there is full of trials and torments. If I had been unable to access some hidden reserves of strength, I probably would have been crushed to pulp. I have found that my sensitivity to shocks from outside has at times reached fever pitch. Added to this, my sense of dualities initially increased: those states of joy and sorrow somehow became so much more pronounced. One minute I might have found myself climbing a peak of joy, the next I might have been wallowing in a mire of self-pity and depreciation.

Our friend

All this may sound like a very potent recipe for mental imbalance but a friend has emerged. We call him the ‘witness’. To me, he is just another guise of the soul. This witness has held me back from a state of full immersion; without him, I would have simply drowned. During the passage of time, he has slowly stepped forward and now he has, in many ways, become my best friend and safeguard. In short, he has taught me to truly observe, not least myself. He points me towards a greater equality.

In yoga, we learn to follow a new master. Instead of being slaves to our nature, I feel that we need to learn to listen to the whispers of what Sri Aurobindo calls our ‘Inner Teacher’. One needs to be very attentive to follow his instructions; he rarely insists. The Inner Teacher teaches me the true way to live. It is a path of boundless delight and I hope and pray that this will be a contract for life.

Through the practice of yoga, I’ve noticed my consciousness gradually becoming more transparent: the many defects of my nature have become more visible. This is not pleasant, as anything

not in its true place tends to severely jar and dislocate the being. At times, it can even produce an ugly sensation in the body. So it is always better to give yourself as much as possible to the Mother and stay on the path. And it is a path which has been minutely mapped out for us. We only need to take the trouble to find out.

Surrender

Lastly, this yoga is one of surrender. It is simply the only way and this demands an offering of the very nature itself. The Mother says:

The most important surrender is the surrender of your character, your way of being, so that it may change. If you do not surrender your very own nature, never will this na-

When one is trying to grow, there are also forces outside that always seem to know which button to press to veer us off-course.

ture change. It is this that is most important. You have certain ways of understanding, certain ways of reacting, certain ways of feeling, almost certain ways of progressing, and above all, a special way of looking at life and expecting from it certain things — well, it is this you must surrender. That is, if you truly want to receive the divine Light and transform yourself, it is your whole way of being you must offer — offer by opening it, making it as receptive as possible so that the divine Consciousness which sees how you ought to be, may act directly and change all these movements into movements more true, more in keeping with your real truth. This is infinitely more important than surrendering what one does. It is not what one does (what one does is very important, that’s evident) that is the most important thing but what one is. Whatever the activity, it is not quite the way of doing it but the state of consciousness in which it is done that is important.⁶

Purification

In yoga, I feel that we go through an accelerated process of purification. New hands are now on the tiller. Every twist and distortion is churned around by the swell of the sadhana and gradually, given time, every single one comes to the surface. There is clearly a reason for this. At the surface, they become more visible to our awareness and when they appear, we are then given the opportunity to extinguish them. If we are watchful, by invoking the light of the Mother, I believe that they can vanish into thin air.

But the stress of the practice can sometimes present great difficulties. As I proceed along the path, deeper, more adhesive patterns come to light and I go down into the darker caverns of my nature.

Painful buried memories start surfacing and below that still, a whole wasteland of obscurity lies before me. In his poem “The Inconscient Founda-

tion,”⁷ Sri Aurobindo, as usual, captures the essence:

My soul regards its veiled subconscious base,
All the dead obstinate symbols of the past,
The hereditary moulds, the stamps of race
Are upheld to sight, the old imprints effaced.

I don’t really invite it; it just happens. These are cryptic domains and the picture I see is not always very pleasant. Some detachment is essential, otherwise I might just get buried in that darkness.

When one is trying to grow, there are also forces outside that always seem to know which button to press to veer us off-course. They can invade even the slightest crack in our armour if we are not awake. One has to learn to stay aligned or there is a danger of going to pieces.

Maybe the stress of yoga creates a greater potential for psychological dis-



ruption. I wouldn't like to say. If our fabric is not resilient enough to face the inevitable impacts, I would say so. Certainly too, any upheaval is likely to be more severe. One has to be ready for this path. Overall, the journey can be very bumpy at times. But the sadhana is not really in my hands; I sometimes think I have to hang on tight because a deep abyss lies far below. But I return to the same point: there is a clear track and clear way. Gradually too, with surrender, a deeper trust intervenes. There is always the Grace of Her love and protection. The child is always safe if it rests inside its mother's arms.

As the work unfolds, inevitably, new difficulties are traded for old, but I find it so bewildering that the same patterns keep on reappearing, albeit in a different guise. So it is my understanding that a positive poise is so important. Otherwise one might simply sink.

The sunlit path

There is a path that is full of trust and a joyful surrender and there is one of gloom and self-denial. It may sound a little trite but taking the 'sunlit path' prevents a considerable amount of difficulty. This attitude has to be protected; it is really our salvation. I know that looking back is not generally recommended but there comes a time when, very much later, we can see that things have truly shifted inside. At that point, we might hardly recognize what we once used to be—that can surely be looked upon as meaningful progress.

So I believe that how we embrace change can make such a difference. Change is inevitable; we can't avoid it. It is an ineluctable law of Nature. But I feel that her ways and twists have made it almost into an edict of decay. That, I guess, is why most people shy away from it. In fact, I've known people who were



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terrified of change per se. Perhaps there is something written in the stars that change must invariably follow the eternal course of gravity, I don't know. But perhaps the law itself can be changed. This, for me, is truly the Mother's work.

I do believe that it is possible for the mind itself to cultivate an opposite point of view. Our mental approach to change is clearly very important. I know that a positive mindset can be a real help. Some people even seem to be born with it. Our upbringing and conditioning can also have a very strong influence. So I also feel that it is something that can be nurtured. But the complete solution, I suggest, lies right inside us and that is to change our consciousness.

If we are able to align ourselves to the rhythm of the soul, we move to an entirely new realm. Depending on how we look at it, we can even move into a world of miracles. Even our circumstances can start to change but perhaps the greatest of all miracles is to change nature herself. Part of the overall picture is our own nature and our soul just knows that it can be changed. That is our field of action and place of work. Nature must change and I believe that true inner health lies in that certainty. I believe that this certitude will come when the mind is completely transformed by the candid trust of the soul.

Disorder

There are so many ways we can lose balance. I guess that most disorders arise when something inside us loses its true place. The vital, for instance, may submerge into a state of depression and imbalance the rest of the nature. The surface mind may cramp the being and cast a shadow of depreciation and judgment. I've even sometimes noticed a little 'critic' who sometimes sneers on the sidelines and scoffs at my every move.

These, I believe, are clearly examples where elements are not in their correct place. Equilibrium is temporarily lost and,

in such instances, for me at least, there is really only one solution. I have to realign myself once more around the centre of my being. I feel that it is a matter of bringing out the 'search-light' of the soul and simply observing, without judgment, what is there. The consciousness holds an enormous power. By invoking the Mother's help and guidance, to begin with, invariably unties the knots created in our lower nature.

I notice that my slate can rarely be wiped clean overnight. Some patterns can often return as quickly as they had disappeared. They seem to travel through me along well-worn channels. If harmony is the aim, these pathways, built and reinforced by our nature, need to be effaced. Only true consciousness, I believe, can do that. So it is my understanding that if we want to always live in this truth, our awareness can never rest. However, I do find it not an impossible task. Once we make the effort to turn inside and truly give ourselves to Her, something new starts to take over: it's like a new engine being installed. This, for me, is the key to the sadhana so thankfully we don't have to fight our battles single-handed.

Gardening

We all know that a garden needs tend-



ing. If the work gets neglected, weeds start appearing and before we know it, in a couple of years, we are facing a veritable jungle. Not surprisingly, our inner world needs tending too. If this work is overlooked, disorder can become more chronic and more severe. I also feel that disruption can expand inside us through contagion. Perhaps it can even proliferate in the same way that cancer spreads throughout the body.

If we cling to disorder too, I fear that difficulty will inevitably increase. In certain instances, a part of our being simply does not want to let it go. One obvious example is desire. Most people in society try to reach some sort of compromise with this state. It is just a part of existence as life without it would be considered very dull indeed. At the same time, there is a sense of moderation and restraint that tries to achieve some sort of balance and so the urge generally gets bottled into manageable proportions. But when we decide on a path of growth, we discern that any desire always causes some degree of imbalance. Nevertheless, a part of us still stubbornly clings onto it. That can sometimes create an unbearable friction. The mind will try to sit on it but the lower vital might now and then break loose and create havoc. The mind and vital reach a state of loggerheads and any semblance of harmony is gone. The mind might retaliate by casting a blanket of censure and guilt. So the end-result is far worse.

Whenever I face an inner difficulty, I always try to remember the body. The body is my anchor; if I lose touch with that, all equilibrium will be lost. Now and then, when I rise in the morning, I can observe a cloud hover over my head. It is depression trying to enter. I then reconnect with my body and, in doing my morning exercise, the haze just drifts away. It is obviously not a definitive solution but I always find that an actual presence in the body helps me to align the nature to a significant extent. Indeed I find my moments of greatest joy invariably arise when I am present in the body. It is like a celebration of wholeness.

The spectrum of psychological disorder is so vast. There is falsehood and,

indeed, at the one extreme, I understand that there is full-scale possession. Many of these states are quite outside my experience, so I find it better not to comment. However, I believe that the overriding feature of every disorder is invariably some sort of rupture with the soul. Sometimes indeed, the dislocation might deteriorate into a massive schism. The soul, after all, is our sanctuary where everything is entire and intact. If we turn our back on it, we have to meet the consequences. Not surprisingly too, the psychic represents our best means back to truth and wholeness.

I realize that physical symptoms can very often intervene. The correlation between material causation and the soul may perhaps offer some fertile ground for research. However it is my impression that the soul provides the single thread that can link such knowledge. It is an enormous realm and man seems to have scarcely touched the surface.

Rejection

There is one remedy that does not rely exclusively on the radiating touch of the soul. That is rejection. The Mother says that an inner aspiration is always important, but even if this is absent, a persistent refusal to allow the lower movements any acknowledgment will produce a positive effect. Because of this, it is logical that this practice can be particularly beneficial in the early phases of sadhana, particularly at a time when the soul is more buried by its instrumental nature. This is clearly the realm of personal effort and this stage, we all know, can last a very long time. I guess too, it also depends on whether this process of catharsis resonates in the individual concerned. The Mother comments:

It is by refusing to give expression—I mean not only in action but also in thought, in feeling. When impulses, thoughts, emotions come, if you refuse to express them, if you push them aside and remain in a state of inner aspiration and calm, then gradually they lose their force and stop coming. So the conscious-

ness is emptied of its lower movements....

In a great aspiration, if you can put yourself into contact with something higher, some influence of your psychic being or some light from above, and if you can manage to put this in touch with these lower movements, naturally they stop more quickly. But before even being able to draw these things by aspiration, you can already stop these movements from finding expression in you by a very persistent and patient refusal. When thoughts which you do not like come, if you just brush them away and do not pay them any attention at all, after some time they won't come any longer. But you must do this very persistently and regularly.⁸

The Mother's words are very clear here and the mode of rejection should never be confused with suppression. Suppression is no sort of solution. I find it only cramps and infuriates the nature. Goodness knows though, we still carry on doing it! But refusing to give the lower movement any expression deprives it of all sustenance. At least, that is my understanding. It cannot survive in such a void and so it sinks down into lower and lower regions. Finally, the Mother says, it reaches its final lodging in the inconscient, and when it is expelled from there it disappears for good. This, I guess, is what is often inferred when someone states that his or her yoga is 'in the subconscious': it indicates how far this process of rejection has gone.

Our path

Ultimately though, I believe that our path is one of transformation and not rejection. Rejection, on its own, is a preparation, albeit sometimes essential, but not the *ultimate* answer. I feel that each one of us has to finally find our own way to align ourselves. To be honest, it is not a solution that I have ever consistently espoused. There have been brief incursions,



even the odd experiment, but another way has always seemed to more naturally fit.

Almost from the beginning, there has only been Her Force and Light and for me, they hold all the answers: even to our most deep-rooted disorders. It is just a matter of opening. The Mother's way, I feel, is finally to transform and not reject. I understand that rejection can provide a crucial stepping-stone, particularly when one is groping in the dark. Sri Aurobindo's 'aspiration, rejection and surrender' holds the key to so many doors but ultimately these three poises are quite meaningless without consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's words always have to be understood in their entirety. I believe that consciousness is the single necessity *whatever* method (if any) one chooses to apply on our way to inner growth.

I also believe that there is a danger too that this action of rejection can almost become a religion. I feel that if the void is never filled by the Higher Force or never touched by the influence of the psychic being, one is left with something almost sterile and bone-dry. Here, Sri Aurobindo advises a disciple on the right action with regard to desire:

No one can easily get rid of desires. What has first to be done is to exteriorize them, to push them out, on the surface and get the inner parts quiet and clear. Afterwards they can be thrown out and replaced by the true thing, a happy and luminous will one with the Divine's.⁹

I am convinced that Sri Aurobindo never intended the Integral Yoga to be a path of rigid asceticism and self-denial. From his words here, it is clear that this distortion of desire is going to be replaced by something *so much* more rich and true. It is just a question of moving to a higher vibration. It is an elevation and not a sacrifice.

Man is neither an automaton nor a machine, he is something so much more: he is a living soul. This soul cannot be satisfied with lavish postures. This soul is waiting at every moment to step forward in our life. But surely it doesn't require any overt sacrifice and austerity to respond to our call.

Detachment

A detached attitude is such a boon to our inner well-being. I feel that the ability to 'step back', disengage and simply observe can save us from a whole heap of trouble. If something inside us remains alert and intact, it saves us from plunging into those chasms of nature. It is so necessary, as Sri Aurobindo often advised, to keep one's station *above* the movement that you want to change.

There was a mistake I made on one occasion and it almost had disastrous consequences. I allowed myself to plunge down into the lower domains and proceeded to grapple with their elements head on. I suppose, at the root, there was a stupendous arrogance. It was almost as if I was trying to wrench the sadhana from the Mother's hands. Sooner or later, with the pressure of the practice, these movements would have surfaced in any case, but my mind and vital were insisting on their own protocol.

Rejection implies *not paying attention* to our lower movements and here I was, trying to wage war on all my desires. I allowed myself to go down to their level and I got swamped. But in the end, that still, quiet voice saved me from being caught in a very nasty mesh and the Mother disentangled me once more. The psychic voice is invariably our final recourse. If we lose touch with that, even madness can engulf us.

The action of truth

Most people, if asked, would claim that truth is just a static concept. It is one of life's 'shoulds': you should tell and adhere to the truth and just that. It almost comes down to an ethical stance. But Truth, for me, really implies integrality: there is a wholeness about it. Its action brings a spontaneous harmony and it has such a power. It also has an action. Indeed, there is a vast consciousness-force that accompanies it. Moreover, this consciousness is *our future*; it is the next rung that man has to climb. It is what can even lift him up to the level of a god. The Mother says that it has to fully manifest before anything

else, even before love. It is already alive and working in the earth atmosphere. Its effects can be felt quite concretely if we remain open.

Most of all, it bears the stamp of the Divine Mother. The Mother, I feel, is the living embodiment of this Truth: when I call Her, I simply call it into my being. There is a part of us which is a portion of this Truth and that is the soul. Not surprisingly, that is where the Mother resides. This is the perfection that integrates everything and the key, I suggest, is consciousness.

Practice

Finally the Truth resolves: it can have a very decisive action. It induces the very act of transformation. Very often, before I start working inside, I might sense a gnawing feeling of unease inside. Something is not right and I feel disturbed. However, I can't put my finger on the root of the problem. It's almost as if a little worm is wriggling inside and I can't locate it. It's just there and I wish it would go away.

So I call Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for help and guidance. I close my eyes and then look within. I quieten the mind and try to look at my nature from the perspective of the soul. I start at the top of my body and work my way slowly down, pausing at each energy centre. As I observe my nature disinterestedly, I can see many uneven patterns. But there can be long pauses when no response seems to come. There are locations where the flow of the Force is interrupted. I might also observe a stain buried somewhere but I have no idea why it is there. I simply cannot *understand* it. I am feeling in the dark.

I need to go into the source of the pain; I want to know what makes it live and breed. At this point, I might feel a stabbing pain and so I allow my consciousness to go right inside it and I silently enquire into its origin. I allow myself to absorb the pain and try to understand it. At the same time, though, a distance is always maintained.

When something true takes over, the action can proceed very quickly. Very often though, if the mind is active, I need to



be patient and bide my time. I call for help and unexpectedly an illumination comes. A truth dawns and in the knowledge of that truth the distortion disappears. Its support vanishes into thin air. I also find it is good to express this knowledge out loud. I so often find that expression accompanies manifestation. If I am present in the psychic, the words will come out automatically. When this action happens, a peace descends. I know the process is complete when I can feel this state vibrating in all the pores of the body. Until the body itself can share in this joy, the work is still incomplete. When it does arrive, there is no feeling quite like it. Sometimes I call peace systematically from top to bottom in the body and this creates a unique vibration in my being. This peace has become my true support in life: it is the source of all stability.

I am finding that the work is going deeper now. I believe that if we are sincere, everything will eventually rise to the surface.

When I first came here, I used to bruise quite easily from outer impacts. Now I find that my weak points have deeper roots and so a more probing observation is required. There are parts of my being which continue to cling to the past. There are so many long-buried memories which need to be filed away and put away for good. So I find myself going down into darker corners. We can never stand still: if progress stops, we will simply fall back. We need a brighter beam all the time.

The light of truth

There is only one Truth. It is absolute, but I suggest that we translate it according to our own degrees. The action, I feel, is unique although it will often vary in intensity. Sometimes however, a more decisive remedy may be required. There may be a stubborn little twist that torments us deeply. It is like a foreign object that has taken up lodging inside our nature. It may indeed be something we can't locate. But we almost feel as if something alien is try-

ing to unbalance or take over our being.

When the Mother directs the light of truth upon us, I believe that the force is even more bright and intense. I guess too, much depends on our capacity to withstand it. The Mother has said that this light of truth is everywhere: it's just that we don't know how to use it. At the highest point, I believe that such tiny drops will one day be our first glimpse of the Supramental Force itself. This is something quite outside my experience, but as long as I open myself to the action of truth, I trust the Mother will prepare me in due time for the inevitable transformation. I also believe that whenever I align myself to the Mother, I open myself more and more to the action and light of the Truth. A simple aspiration is enough.

For me, there is always a feeling of resonance when I stand in this truth; it's like I become quite transparent.

Calling the light

The Mother says that calling this light is quite simple:

Of course if you ask me, 'What should I do?'—anyone at all among you—I shall tell you, 'My children, it is very easy, you have only to call me, and then when you feel the contact, well, you put it upon the thing till that part has understood.'¹⁰

The Mother describes the action as follows:

There is a great difference between pushing back a thing simply because one doesn't want it and changing the state of one's consciousness which makes the thing totally foreign to one's nature. Usually, when one has a movement one doesn't want, one drives it away or pushes it back, but one doesn't take the precaution of finding within oneself

what has served and still serves as a support for this movement, the particular tendency, the fold of the consciousness which enables the thing to enter the consciousness. If, on the contrary, instead of simply making a movement of reprobation and rejection, one enters deeply into his vital consciousness and finds the support, that is, a kind of particular little vibration buried very deeply in a corner, often in such a dark corner that it is difficult to find it there; if one starts hunting it down, that is, if one goes within, concentrates, follows as it were the trail of this movement to its origin, one finds something like a very tiny serpent coiled up, something at times quite tiny, not bigger than a pea, but very black and sunk very deeply.

And then there are two methods: either to put so intense a light, the light of the truth-consciousness

so strong, that this will be dissolved; or else to catch the thing as with pincers, pull it out from its place and hold it up before one's consciousness. The first method is radical but one doesn't always have at his disposal this light of truth, so one can't always use it. The second method can be taken, but it hurts, it hurts as badly as the extraction of a tooth; I don't know if you have ever had a tooth pulled out, but it hurts as much as that, and it hurts here, like that. (*Mother shows the centre of the chest and makes a movement of twisting.*) And usually one is not very courageous. When it hurts very much, well, one tries to efface it like this (*gesture*) and that is why things persist. But if one has the courage to take hold of it and pull it until it comes out and to put it before himself, even if it hurts very much... to hold it up like this (*gesture*) until one can see it clearly, and then dissolve it, then it is finished. The thing will



never again hide in the subconscious and will never again return to bother you. But this is a radical operation. It must be done like an operation.¹¹

The Mother has stated that this procedure can be adopted and, whatever the circumstance, the result is always the same:

Some people have all kinds of little things like this in their head, dark little things. Some people have them here (*Mother points to the heart*), others have them lower down, for each one it depends... but for each one it is the same thing, it is always... I am saying this because it is very remarkable that if one does the work—whoever it may be—the result is always the same, wherever it may be, whether in the head or the chest or in all the centres of consciousness, if one pushes the investigation far enough, step by step, step by step, untiring-ly, one always reaches something.... Then one takes it by the tail and pulls it out.¹²

Our nature

Many influences build up our nature. I sometimes have the feeling of a mighty edifice that goes back generations before my birth. I believe that even our individuality, which is unique, creates certain tramlines for these patterns of nature to emerge. These patterns create grooves and, over time, our nature is formed. Our nature is not 'us'; it is but a façade, but I feel that our truth can get so buried inside it that we lose track of who we are. It is a very unpleasant situation and that probably explains why most of society is simply dissatisfied. To go through life without this knowledge seems almost absurd but that seems to be a reality for many.

It is only by changing the tilt of our awareness that this situation can change. I believe that we can transcend and rise above our nature. At least we can try. True fulfilment lies in growing, by meeting what Sri Aurobindo terms the 'impulse towards self-exceeding'. This, I feel, must

surely be why the Mother termed an 'aimless life a miserable life'.

Truth of the being

It can take a while to understand our true individuality. I have found it requires considerable observation and this knowledge can only come through experience. Whenever I find my attention upstairs in the head I get pulled around in all sorts of directions. Over time, I have discovered that a truer home is the heart. For me, there is always a feeling of resonance when I stand in this truth; it's like I become quite transparent. It's a little like swimming with an enormous tide behind me. And nothing can move us as much as love. It brings such a simple joy and that's why it particularly vibrates in this body. In fact, the body has become almost entirely dependent on it.

I sometimes feel that one single drop of love would be enough to totally transform and cure the body. It's just that one must be in a proper state to receive it! When love rises up to more sublime heights, occasional glints of bliss pervade the being. For me, it is the most natural gateway to the soul. Every heightened experience I have seems to emanate from love. On the other hand, when I feel grey and dry inside, when the ordinary mind engulfs it, I feel lifeless and narrow. Whenever the mind stamps on the heart, it throttles the truth that the being wants to express.

Love and attachment

But I find that the way of the heart can bring complications. One that has particularly fazed me is attachment. From our first days on this earth, we seem to build up networks of attachment. We do this to people, to objects and to circumstances. In fact, we often seem to do it with almost anything we covet and, in so doing, we bind ourselves hand and foot. The trouble is, we build up requirements; we try to impose conditions. It's like what we have inside us is not enough. We impose expectations on the outside and lose touch

with what is true inside. Whilst we're doing this, we're not only imprisoning others but casting a huge net around ourselves too. And so we relinquish our seat of power to nature herself. We lose our freedom and we become more vulnerable to attack, creating many gaps that leave us gaping inside. There is a feeling of being raw and exposed.

I believe that many of us face a challenge with at least one relationship in our life. It is like a concentration of all our 'impossibilities'. It is the one knot that we must untie in this life. The Mother emphasizes the need to build up company which truly nurtures us. But sometimes we do not have a choice. There are some relationships which are not so free. I can feel such contacts suffocate the being and still they continue to cause me pain. I sometimes feel trapped: they reinforce negative patterns and the formations that often arise from them simply make me shrink. Distance is quite immaterial in this context; these threads of attachment can run for thousands of miles! When faced with a wall of negativity, I find it so difficult to stand in my truth. But the Mother tells us that the solution is *not* to run away:

To be free from all attachment does not mean running away from all occasion for attachment. All these people who assert their asceticism, not only run away but warn others not to try!

This seems so obvious to me. When you need to run away from a thing in order not to experience it, it means that you are not above it, you are still on the same level.

Anything that suppresses, diminishes or lessens cannot bring freedom. Freedom has to be experienced in the whole of life and in all sensations.¹³

I'm convinced that it is possible to reach a zone where one can truly love without possibility of recoil. I have now concluded that my *only* solution is to only love more and try to love more truly. It might be more convenient to abide in a



state of *sattwic* indifference but I really don't think that is the way that the Mother intends for me. I feel that my challenge is to raise its level to the highest possible vibration. At the highest point, love is vast and free. It is an impersonal force. True love is, after all, totally disinterested, but I'd sooner love imperfectly than not at all.

The net

To have no idea who or what we are is the ultimate obscurity, but to have an inking and pretend what one is *not* probably causes an even greater suffering. And yet, I suggest, this is what we do much of our time. It is so ingrained and, at the core, it is really a very subtle falsehood. The desire to be popular, the desire to be admired, the desire to be virtuous and even the desire to be just plain good are examples of this. Every time we project ourselves in a way we feel that the world *should* see us, we play this game of hide and seek. We try to create a stereotype of ourselves and that only cramps us and makes us very, very small. What's more, we can *never* achieve anything: it is totally illusory. Even animals suffer less than man. In reality, we create our own net. The ego, after all, is the final limitation and the only way we can expand is to drop this cloak and stand in our truth. That is why I feel that it is the key to inner perfection.

A new life

To shed our nature and stand in our truth can sometimes be a painful journey. For some, I guess, it is a road laid with thistles and thorns. That is why I am so grateful to the Mother for the gentle way She has eased me into a very different culture and way of life. Over ten years ago, I came to Pondicherry and started a new life. I arrived weighed down with baggage. Inside, everything was tangled up and confused. I am so grateful that, from day one, the Mother has taken charge of my being.

Most of all, I feel, the Mother has

greatly simplified my life and simplified my being. At times though, She has almost stripped me down to the bone. The body too has emerged as an unusual ally and together they are teaching me the art of true humility. Any vestige of self-importance is still being squeezed out from me drop by drop. As a friend once told me long ago, it is easier to be a 'nobody' if you intend to walk this path.

Living in the soul

To live in the soul is the culmination of a colossal journey. In some ways, I believe that it is perhaps the greatest expedition that man has ever made. It is surely a voyage without end. It is a journey which takes us deeper and deeper to the core of our existence. I know that some reversals

To shed our nature and stand in our truth can sometimes be a painful journey. For some, I guess, it is a road laid with thistles and thorns.

are inevitable but long-term progress must surely be a key to true inner health. Just to aspire and grow, for me, is sufficient.

It is a little like passing through a very long tunnel into the light. This light is truly the answer to all my yearning. Observing myself, this yearning, which was almost hidden at the outset, has now come more and more to the surface. I believe that it is this yearning that keeps us going. And when the destination is reached, the Mother says, it is truly a new birth:

You become a new person, and whatever may be the path or the difficulties of the path afterwards, that feeling never leaves you. It is not even something—like many other experiences—which withdraws, passes into the background, leaving you externally with a kind of vague memory to which it is difficult to cling, whose remembrance grows faint, blurred—it is not that. You *are* a new person and definitively that, whatever happens. And even

all the incapacity of the mind, all the difficulties of the vital, all the inertia of the physical are unable to change this new state—a new state which makes a *decisive* break in the life of the consciousness. The being one was before and the being one is after, are no longer the same. The position one has in the universe and in relation to it, in life and in relation to it, in understanding and in relation to it, is no longer the same: it is a true reversal which can never be undone again. That is why when people tell me, 'I would like to know whether I am in contact with my soul or not,' I say, 'If you ask the question, it is enough to prove that you are not. You don't need an answer, you are giving it to yourself.' When it is *that*,

it is that, and then it is finished, it is no longer anything else.¹⁴

Oneness

Last of all, I feel, truth means oneness. We are one. We are one with creation: we are one soul and we swim in a vast sea of oneness. I believe that when we *realize* this fact we at last stand in our truth. Indeed, it is only the action of truth that can harmonize the different shades and contrasts of existence. Indeed, perhaps it is these diverse hues that make life so rich and fascinating! But the reality is that *everything* is essentially one.

I believe that each one of us can start with one small detail to fully appreciate this. This detail can be our *own* being itself. I guess that all true understanding starts at the microcosm. As we get closer to this knowledge, we can clearly see that it is only separation and division that cramps us. We call that the ego. But once this simple wisdom is fully absorbed, even our own nature might be looked upon as just a small link in this captivating game of multiplicity and oneness.

Inside all of us, I believe, is something that fully understands this truth. It's just that it wants to live it in *all* its aspects.



Rick Lipschutz

Making *our* being *one* is true progress; only then can it truly expand and become free. And to live in the soul, I suggest, is to live in this state of oneness. I can't really think of anything more perfect than that.

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The soul that makes us matter

by Rick Lipschutz

We shattered the atom in a desert valley, blew it up into blinding bits.

We've seen the pictures. The nuclear device exploded in 1945 near Alamogordo in the Jornada del Muerto—journey of the dead man—an inhospitable valley in the New Mexico desert, has challenged us to our slender core. We face the specter of responsibility over forces we hold not the scepter to rule. How won't our species disintegrate but continue, move forward as everyone likes to say? Both first nuclear test and threefold divine nature we know by the same code name. Trinity changed the world forever.

But surface happenings, even brilliant ones "brighter than a thousand suns,"¹ reflect profounder truths. On this basis, I claim we have, inside us, a device, from which all other devices have been devised, a superconscious nuclear device that can, that will truly change the world for good. And the explosion it emits is more than a flash that fouls and a light filled with loathing. It's the blast that comes to stay. It is the very device which the will, embedded in the originating brightness, has devised, in order for spirit to directly intervene in this world, in ourselves. It is an action more than a thing, but it's way beyond either. It is an undivided piece of the love that threw itself down, into the pre-evolutionary pit below our base, and goes on working silently till it can, free at long last, take effect on the surface.

The released energy of the atomic nucleus is only a small, surface phenomenon, in the light of the energy contained within our own soul-atom.

In both cases, the splitting of the atom unlocks immense energy, contained under the lid of surface matter. Each explosion emits an energy of another nature than the one we know. This gives us more than a hint that not only is the soul the source of any significance the world holds,

at the root of any value we ourselves have: it is the soul that has made matter what it is and what it will be, and therefore the soul, assuming its union with the splendor of its source, has the potential to unfold in, and as, matter the all-powerful essence of its maker.

The only peaceful atom is the soul atom; the energy from its explosion alone is one with a wisdom so true that it transforms.

And it can be every bit an atomic explosion when our soul bursts into the foreground of this life, emerges to open daylight. Sudden is the bursting of the ancient veil. For all the world it seems there's been a change of suns. A sunshower of our soul changes the world we are, not—yet—all its surface but in essence; much more so than more-celebrated events that put Socorro on the map and led Einstein to lament in a telegram: "The release of atom power has changed everything but our way of thinking."² It's not the atom, it's the mind that splits. Because, when soul comes to its own, everything can change. Soul with innate focus may come forward with an intention to shake our ways up, make human means novel and each thing's meaning new: more brilliant than the colors that in a flash of summer morning took the mountains and the sky.

Two explosions with a crucial difference. On the route of the dead man, we see and hear:

War making naught the sweet
smiling calm of life,
Battle and rapine, ruin and massacre
Are still the fierce pastimes of man's
warring tribes;
An idiot hour destroys what
centuries made...³

Inside that last line there's a loud sharp clap, and we hear, as if from its nucleus "the riven invisible atom's omnipotent force."⁴

But the explosion of new life we feel when our soul finally surfaces: this is like controlled radioactivity. It's the holy grail our science hasn't found. It's conscious, transformative: a flower of light explodes



in the center of our being. Our being of light, round whom is growing a healing body of light, comes forward to stand in front: the being our soul is becoming. The person we actually are has not only a calm wisdom to guide our human nature, step by step, but also the sweet silent power to take up and begin to transform whatever in us we're willing to hand over to the mysterious forces that produced our kind.

"A solitary second can be the spark potent to explode a whole past."⁵ What happens in that second?

"One is like an explosive that nothing can resist, and one bursts out from one's prison in a blaze of light."⁶ Not the light we know, but full and rich, a fundamental radiance. "If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth at once in the sky, that would be like the splendour of the Mighty One."⁷ But the soul is a mighty shy one, still and quiet; even when it bursts forth in light so intense it fills our being,⁸ it remains quiet and still, never losing that tranquility. Though patient enduring effort precedes its emergence, this moving forward may be far from gradual. Something opens that nothing in the world ever prepared us for. Suddenly, forcibly our soul can burst through its veil, which does feel like detonation, but one that fills us with delight. It has a forceful sweetness to it so that you feel you touch some smiling substance of immortality, which once stabilized never leaves you. Or it does leave you stripped down to the divine spark. For some, no explosions necessary, no veil's evident, only soul embracing surface life in quiet constant presence. Your life once immersed in the soul-presence forever changes: one step back, and you're meeting in the endless moment where the part your soul first touched in you remains in that embrace.

I'm writing here in blowing dust of New Mexico. A few miles from the river of this place, stuck between extinct volcanoes and mountain ranges hazed from wildfire smoke, I'm in a stretch of valley not too awfully far from the site of that first, mesmerizing explosion near the northern outer limits of the White Sands Proving Ground. That July morning the Jornada

will be remembered by—the overclouding kept growing and, glowing, held hot skies. Golden-yellow. Orange-crimson. Purple-green. White-blue. Those colors eyes had to see for our minds to imagine. There are other eyes, on the face of our own internal desert, that enjoy the sight of that far-more-beautiful second blast, the one (or the Trinity site) inside ourselves; exploding forward with all the force necessary to make our world whole.

Did you think your higher nature just stood there, subtle and tenuous above you, having no effect on your life? Far from it. True, the extension of the soul, its subtle form, is of a rich texture, a velvet-soft substance that can modify the very vital substance of the emotional nature. Even this thin surface crust is touched and may respond to others in kind. But soul is so nuanced one tends to forget how its nucleus carries with it a stupendous force. The soul possesses and it is of an "ineffable plasticity"⁹ like plasma and at its core—so the core of the higher nature—you are at the center of God, burning with the divine fire.

As I write these lines orange flame, up until summer 2011 the largest wildfire in New Mexican history, licks at the edges of Los Alamos National Laboratory, crown jewel of our nuclear deterrence. We live in a fire, not in a dream. Will you open your eyes with me and begin to see the white gold light in the Los Alamos of your soul.

The atom of science pales before the dynamics of our own soul-atom.

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2. Albert Einstein, from letter published in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*,

May 1946 (archives, website of the Educational Foundation for Nuclear Science). Einstein added: 'I should have been a watchmaker.'

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7. *Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, chapter 11, verse 12. J. Robert Oppenheimer, scientific director, Manhattan Project, recalled this verse (with "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds") flashed through his mind that witnessed the Trinity nuclear fireball, watching that cloud forming strange summer rain that a finer perception might have sensed insinuate into the grain of the Jornada del Muerto. Beyond the valley, exceeding expectation, it worked. Energy will do that. The secret laboratory on the mesa to the north had done well. Tales that cattle turned white or grey are told too often to be urban legend.

8. Wayne Bloomquist, *God Shall Grow Up: Body, Soul, and Earth Evolving Together*, Pondy Publishing, 2001, p. 32. His own words: "...an intense light suddenly filled my being."

9. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vols. 22-24, 1970, p. 1113. The original letter to which Sri Aurobindo replied is found in Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1952, p. 471. A selection: "...I experienced a velvety softness within and a feeling of ineffable plasticity which rapidly grew into something so concrete that I felt almost as if I could touch it with my fingers!...[M]y restlessness was redeemed by peace and my darkness by a radiance which seemed too incredible to be true and yet too vivid to be dismissed as wishful thinking. And to me it seemed so utterly convincing because it seemed to descend, like an avalanche, from nowhere—to sweep me off my feet when I least expected it."



American road trip

by John Robert Cornell

*This living flowing land
is all there is, forever
We are it
it sings through us*¹

~ Gary Snyder, American poet

*[T]herefore man has to discover his spiritual unity with all creatures, to see all in the self and the self in all beings, even to see all things and creatures as himself...*²

~ Sri Aurobindo

When he came home for Thanksgiving vacation his uncle took him out on a canoe on a lake, and after he got him midlake, he said, "Oren, you've been to college and you must be pretty smart. Now tell me, who are you?" Of course Oren was taken aback and said, "What do you mean? I'm Oren Lyons." His uncle said, "No, who are you?" After he tried a few more times, and the uncle wouldn't have it he gave up and said, "Okay, who am I?" His uncle said, "Do you see that huge pine over on that shore?" Oren said, "Of course." His uncle said, "You are that pine, and the bluff on that side, Oren, you are that bluff, and this water that is supporting this canoe, Oren, you are that water."³

~ Oren Lyons, Onondaga elder and first member of the tribe to go to college

*[T]he whole of existence must be regarded as a field of the soul's construction and action in the midst of Nature... For in each embodied creature there is this one Knower...*⁴

~ Sri Aurobindo

Long ago... before you were a lantern of awareness in a half-animal body, brimming with thoughts and memories and hopes and worries, hurrying down the stairs briefcase in hand, or studying your features in the bathroom mirror with critical eye...

Long before you slid into the world, already in that body for your latest outing...



Long, long before your parents, or their great-grandparents, or *their* earliest ancestors arrived in matter and crossed continents and seas...

Long before any of that, *awareness* was here in other bodies, less concentrated perhaps, different containers and instruments, but otherwise the same "awaring." The same humming cognizance—voiceless, thought-free, without eyes or other windows or doors—was here.

In pauses of deep stillness—in deep forest or during a thunderstorm, in battle or by a dying person's bedside or in the first seconds after waking from a nap—you may have noticed that it is still here. As if all beings, even trees and granite cliffs and thunder clouds, are carriers. Carriers of that same *humming*, that *awaring*, that you carry in your lantern...

And, if we push language a little farther—because we want it to serve our purpose, not obstruct with its casual familiarity—we could just say, "carriers of you." If we extend "you" beyond the *carrier* of that lantern, beyond the lantern's glass and frame, to include that pure silent glow inside the lantern, that glow that radiates out through the lantern's windows, out through your eyes and your handshake and your "Hi. How are you?"...

If we can make that transition, extend the essence of you to that awareness itself, so that *you are that*... If we can do that, then we can go on. Because we have promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep.

A very long time ago, then, at this land's beginnings, you—this extended or original you of pure awareness—were the ancient sleeping secret, some unnamed dim expectancy flickering only in vacant primordial dreams.

And huge activity was stirring your deeps. In ageless slow motion, your depths and surfaces buckled and heaved and erupted. Lava poured out. Granite rose across your ages like a white whale from your deeps. Water and wind ground out your clay and sand. Vast, wind-piled dunes gathered on your chest and then squeezed into sandstone foundations. You rose in Appalachia first and then in western mountains, sliced with rivers, sculpted and wore away with winds and waves and storms. A great Potter force was kneading your earth-dough, mixing and watering and warming your clay. Slowly, over eons, across eons.

Then, as if waking to some mysterious glance, a new wave of activity emerged: Miraculous minuscule beings, impossible forms and faces of some unspoken, unthought yearning in your depths, woke from their cocoon, began bursting out of your bones of granite and veins of schist and wombs of water. A tide—your tiny numberless hoards—newly, dimly awake, hurried and clamored across your vast prairie and burrowed into your foothills, scattering faint fragments of this awareness-fire, of you, everywhere they passed.

The night glimmered. This first bare glistening crossed your sleeping body of Nature and reflected back to the stars. A promiscuous forming and miracle-making pulse of newness had arrived, struggling out of your rock, squeezing from your ocean sands or riding its surface. Meeting, battling, spreading, organizing, clumping—a universe of minutia, mini-colonizers of your mountains and valleys, invaders and disturbers of the long night of your sleep.

Your body seethed with a breathing, probing, climbing, devouring, multiplying, clustering tsunami of your life-forms. A humming fragmented OMing



spread out over your prairies and rivers and mountains and beaches and canyons. Your deserts and your skies teemed with a kaleidoscope of your life forms, these fireflies of awareness, servants and bearers of your deep yearning, inventors and seekers and growers of unreached heights and forgotten depths.

Ages passed in this compromising of your drowse, this first waking, this slow eruption of life-light in every direction, under every boulder, clustering in vast forests and shimmering schools, grassy wetlands and ice-clad peaks, noon-darkening flights and thundering herds and stealthy, laser-like hunters. The flickerings of your dreams had burst into life. Your winds stirred the half-sleep in your caves and canyons.

Came again the mysterious glance, and another pulse of awakening brightened the long slow dawn. Two-footed awareness-carriers

quietly appeared on your borders balancing a greater intensity of waking across your meadows, over your Sierra passes and down your rivers. This was new. You had not taken this form before. Your emergence from the sleep of rock and water widened. This two-legged form of awareness walked upright. You scanned the circling heavens with its eyes for the rumor, the secret of what and why, still half-drugged from your torpor of eons. Wonder peeked out from inside the transparent globe of your thought, and gratitude seeped from your chest and surrounded this form of you like perfume. It spread out among your flowers and touched the rough bark of your tree-forms.

This new round of the dance took shape when their half-animal eyes looked into a river pool.

For a second, the pool's surface shape-shifted into a mirror.

Zam! Contact.

The lantern glow inside *saw itself*...

then vanished back into the river depths! A new seeing flared momentarily on Earth. *Matter's* eyes touched the secret. Knowing glimpsed *knowing*, *that subtle flame of light inside!* The ancient yearning swelled in your chests, rumbled in your mountains, sighed across your prairie. Antlered eyes stopped browsing and stared. Huge sugar pines listened to you in the wind's murmur: *This has come. This will not pass away.*

The pace picked up. The long road bent quickly upward. That deathless memory haunted your two-leggeds' eyes. It made them crazy. It would not go away. They did not know what it was. That memory kept turning their clay hands and half-animal hearts inside out. Confusion wrinkled their foreheads and slowly inched towards

You are going somewhere and you are not there yet. A far more perfect union, unimagined as yet, calls from your deeps.

their heart. They didn't know anymore if they were this or That! The first *I-questions* appeared and multiplied, boring tunnels into the air: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? How do I get there? What is it to die?

And then we-questions: Who are *we*? How far does *we* extend?

Gradually, over millennia, we, an unfinished shape of you, extended from family to band to tribe, and spread through your hardwood forests and down your sandstone canyons. Even the hunt for meat was ambushed and included. Somehow these fragments of *you intuited you there* too. Hunt and feast became deep communion.

Including became more deliberate. Aimless curiosity gave birth to observation and wonder. Observation discovered discovery, and wonder danced in celebration. Life wavered and shimmered like a mirage. Who was this magician? What was behind the curtain? And what of that memory, that returns and glows and aches in the chest?

Excluding also became more delib-

erate. Death's fierce face stalked the day and howled in the night. Knowledge grew, and ignorance. Power grew, and domination throve, old as predation. The teeth and claws of domination, already richly developed and deeply rooted in the body's nerves and gut and in life's millennial memories, hijacked new forms and rationales. They joined the feast, always alert to tilt its table toward their gaping mouth.

But the sun sibling *inside* slowly unveiled more of your face. New powers sprouted like flowers in spring. Culture condensed on land: Thought-traces from some invisible source joined into patterns in dance and song and matter's dress. You conjured language for your two-leggeds, with its right foot planted on land and left foot dangling over ... what? Over those

diaphanous flickering thought-tracks: Your two-legged forms saw the bison with their eyes but also a ghostly echo-glow of the bison

with some hidden inner power. And their seers traveled beyond this thin thought-world to the living bison Master behind, from whose veiled hands bison flowed back into form on your Great Plains. Slowly, piece meal, you uncovered fragments of your force and your beauty. Your two-leggeds ran off in every direction and returned untutored wizards, materializing feats and rules and customs like weeds in a garden. You spread your tinkering in every tuck and corner of your surface.

And then, on your eastern shore, your white-faced two-leggeds arrived with musket and cross.

In an age's instant you swarmed them across your body from sea to sea. The current of their arrival siphoned also your black-faced and yellow-faced two-legged forms from far fields and forests. Your new air and soil scraped off mind-frames and body-habits as the newcomers clashed and settled. Particles and pulses of the old sod survived and strove with your incomparable wild freshness. The old and the new coalesced into towns and cities on your coasts, your knees and your



belly. Your body from sea to sea grew a mind of many sparks and strands. "E pluribus unum," your heart breathed into it, one from many. "All men are created equal," you shot into the sky like fire-works. "We the People," you spread like honey over the mindscape. "I shall win, I shall be rich, I shall be free," they shouted. "To form a more perfect union," you etched on your political scripture.

The half-visible age of mind continues emerging today, clashing and grinding down brittle ideas and worn assumptions. Breaking and exploding them. Compressing, melting, remaking, and blasting them again like some mighty recycling machine. Always you dream the impossible dream. Our imagination barely notices until the impossible turns slowly around and then slides abruptly inside mundane unremarkable fact: rain clouds, life from inanimate matter, sandstone cliffs, the giant sequoia, physical sight, bees' dancing, Niagara Falls, the monarch butterfly's migration, the Grand Canyon, White Buffalo Woman, the Great Law of Peace, government by the people and for the people, the Bill of Rights, Amazing Grace, the end of slavery, universal education, national parks, the light bulb, the telephone, universal suffrage, the defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, the Marshall Plan, Dr. King, the moon landing, the Hubble telescope, the computer, the internet. Still your breath does not diminish, and still your prophet cries, "I have a dream!"

"To form a more perfect union," your black presider echoes.

In this compressed moment of emergence, mighty wings drive your great



Forest trail. Photo courtesy <http://www.freepixels.com>.

world Force down across the forests and rivers and fields of your body. Your soil has opened to your mind-will. Your tree-forms have fallen, your skies have swallowed smoke and poison, your depths have yielded black sunshine, your children have died and returned.

But your journey to some unique flavor of awaring is far from over. "*All is not finished in the unseen decree.*"⁵ You have miles to go before you sleep. It is still morning. "*A Mind beyond our mind demands our ken.*"⁶ Through the ebb and flow of the creative and destructive energies across your skies and soil and moving waters, the swirl of your life fragments and the invisible tide of your group mind, you peered out after Pearl Harbor and again on 9/11, patient, full of determination, gathering your story.

You have a dream. "*A life of unim-*

aged harmony awaits, concealed, the grasp of unborn men."⁷ You are going somewhere and you are not there yet. A far more perfect union, unimagined as yet, calls from your deeps. You have so many promises to keep. Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. Many colors and many peoples have come to your banquet. Unexpected others still lie in shadow, awaiting their moment. We, a faint partial realization of you, have scarcely an infant's inkling of what majesty you have stored for us in your chest of dreams. But we divine in some deep place that you are on the road and what spacious skies you bring to this road trip, O Beautiful. Even our dissatisfactions drive us on the way.

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The freedom of the Integral Yoga

By August Timmermans

Sri Aurobindo does not belong to history; he is outside and beyond history. [He] has shown that the truth does not lie in running away from earthly life but in remaining in it, to transform it, divinise it, so that the Divine can manifest here, in this physical world.¹ —The Mother

Religion and yoga are not situated on the same plane of the being, and the spiritual life can exist in its purity only if it is free from all mental dogma.² —The Mother

As the world moves forward while occasionally triggering extreme reactionary movements on its way, I would never have thought that these eruptions would affect the collective of the Integral Yoga and the Ashram in particular. There has been the air of conservative religion if not the signs of Hindutva breezing over. One may wonder then what the true spirit is of a sadhak of the integral yoga.

I never thought that this groundbreaking Integral Yoga could be an extension of Hinduism or that it would relate to living a religious life that requires traditional worship of the gurus. The way I understand the life divine that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have set out as the goal hardly reminds me of previous formulated philosophy let alone religion, but its process of supramentalization to get there does remind me of a laboratory of consciousness, as mentioned by the Mother in the Agenda. For me, the Hindu and Buddhist conclusions that life is illusion and suffering and the Christian belief of one life being followed by either heaven or hell, are shattered by Sri Aurobindo's supramental vision. It not only surpasses the traditional yogas with their sole aim of liberation and the old belief systems that take the afterlife as one's final destiny—but it bursts out of these confinements and enters into its own space, free from every-



thing previously thought, envisioned and tried.

Our Yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.³

It is not [Sri Aurobindo's] object to develop anyone religion or to amalgamate the older religions or to found any new religion—for any of these things would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature.⁴

Having come free from my Christian religion at a young age when one Sunday I decided not to go to church anymore, it was not an easy decision to live with for some time. I found the institution a strange distraction in its belief system. Naturally, my father took my decision as his personal failing in raising me into a good Roman Catholic. I think it is due to the Dutch democratic society and its open education system that also my father finally understood that religion cannot be forced on someone even if it is your own child. To become free in a society that is already individual-oriented was difficult enough for me, but to become free in a collective-based culture like India's must

be hard. I remember that I did not go to India specifically for its culture and traditions or to adopt a new religion, but to enter more fully into the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo which addressed the human being and human life at large in the context of transformation and spiritual living. It did not particularly relate to race, nation, religion and culture but to the inmost soul and Atman which are free from such confinements.

I find it striking that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother started from other cultures, England and France, and obviously did not have the unconscious religion of Hinduism to deal with in themselves. This must have been a contributing factor that allowed them to think openly and freely about Indian religion. In the publication *On Himself*, Sri Aurobindo states that he did build his sadhana and insights on the intrinsically profound Gita, Upanishads and Veda, but proceeded in following his own spiritual experiences and insights, formed his own conclusions, and developed the Integral or Supramental Yoga. He points to the unique goal of the supramentalization of the human being and human life, and although its principle was foreseen in the Veda, it was not previously pursued in the way he and the Mother had done. Maybe Sri Aurobindo was too polite to acknowledge that his vision surpassed all the fields of culture, yoga paths and religions that Hinduism covered. It also revealed entirely new insights of our existence. The evolutionary stages of the human being driven by the inmost soul that ultimately leads to a new creation, the supramental being.

One of the greater insights and genuine freedoms I find in the Integral Yoga relates to the delicate and complex process of the triple transformation: psychic, spiritual and supramental that incorporates the transformation of mind, vital and body, and the complex nature, character and psyche of each sadhak. They make for one of the Integral Yoga's most unique aspects of practice—the freedom for each sadhak to realize the divine through one's inherently personal way. Evidently, the Integral Yoga cannot be translated and codi-



fied into rules of morality or practice and applied to all sadhaks.

Each one has his own way of doing Sadhana and his own approach to the Divine and need not trouble himself about how the others do it...⁵

It is generally known that Sri Aurobindo's vision of the supramental future is not to be built on the foundations of the past but from a new basis. Just like the Ashram began with only a few rules and Auroville began on a desert plain with the ideal to be 'above all creeds,' the true spirit of the sadhana of the Integral Yoga is to go beyond religion and traditional culture. Culture normally forms and conditions our psyche and external life, but Integral Yoga focuses on the change of consciousness that will lead one to the true being and into the spiritual life.

The spiritual life (*adhyatma-jivana*), the religious life (*dharma-jivana*) and the ordinary human life of which morality is a part are three quite different things and one must know which one desires and not confuse the three together. The ordinary life is that of the average human consciousness separated from its own true self and from the Divine and led by the common habits of the mind, life and body which are the laws of the Ignorance. The religious life is a movement of the same ignorant human consciousness, turning or trying to turn away from the earth towards the Divine, but as yet without knowledge and led by the dogmatic tenets and rules of some sect or creed which claims to have found the way out of the bonds of the earth-consciousness into some beautiful Beyond. The religious life may be the first approach to the spiritual, but very often it is only a turning about in a round of rites, ceremonies and practices or set ideas and forms with-

out any issue. The spiritual life, on the contrary, proceeds directly by a change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness, ignorant and separated from its true self and from God, to a greater consciousness in which one finds one's true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine. For the spiritual seeker this change of consciousness is the one thing he seeks and nothing else matters.⁶

Uniquely, Integral Yoga offers a sublime freedom—the freedom for each sadhak to follow one's own way to the realization of the divine, and the freedom of the

They make for one of the Integral Yoga's most unique aspects of practice—the freedom for each sadhak to realize the divine through one's inherently personal way.

collectivity to live and build a spiritual life that is not prescribed by artificial dogma but inspired by the higher consciousness that ultimately derives from the living supramental plane and that clings to nothing but the essential and abiding truth, —leading to the ultimate goal of the life divine.

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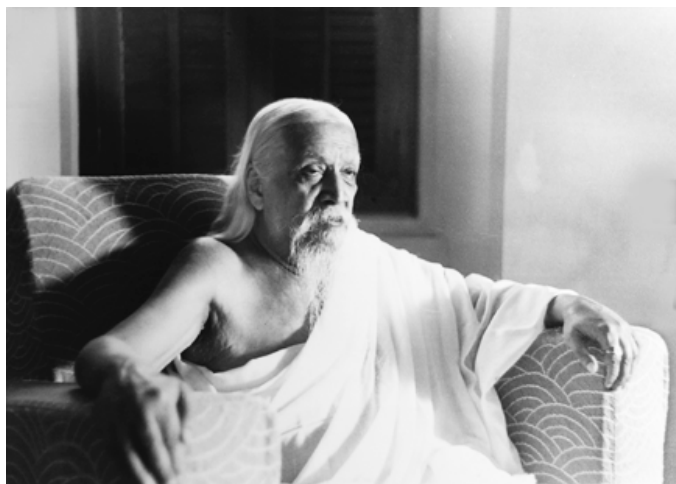
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Source Material

The psychic transformation

by Sri Aurobindo

As the evolution proceeds, Nature begins slowly and tentatively to manifest our occult parts; she leads us to look more and more within ourselves or sets out to initiate more clearly recognisable intimations and formations of them on the surface. The soul in us, the psychic principle, has already begun to take secret form; it puts forward and develops a soul personality, a distinct psychic being to represent it. This psychic being remains still behind the veil in our subliminal part, like the true mental, the true vital or the true or subtle physical being within us: but, like them, it acts on the surface life by the influences and intimations it throws up upon that surface; these form part of the surface aggregate which is the conglomerate effect of the inner influences and upsurgings, the visible formation and superstructure which we ordinarily experience and think of as ourselves. On this ignorant surface we become dimly aware of something that can be called a soul as distinct from mind, life or body; we feel it not only as our mental idea or vague instinct of ourselves, but as a sensible influence in our life and character and action. A certain sensitive feeling for all that is true and good and beautiful, fine and pure and noble, a response to it, a demand for it, a pressure on mind and life to accept and formulate it in our thought, feelings, conduct, character is the most usually recognised, the most general and characteristic, though not the sole sign of this influence of the psyche. Of the man who has not this element in him or does not respond at all to this urge, we say that



he has no soul. For it is this influence that we can most easily recognise as a finer or even a diviner part in us and the most powerful for the slow turning towards some aim at perfection in our nature.

But this psychic influence or action does not come up to the surface quite pure or does not remain distinct in its purity; if it did, we would be able to distinguish clearly the soul element in us and follow consciously and fully its dictates. An occult mental and vital and subtle-physical action intervenes, mixes with it, tries to use it and turn it to its own profit, dwarfs its divinity, distorts or diminishes its self-expression, even causes it to deviate and stumble or stains it with the impurity, smallness and error of mind and life and body. After it reaches the surface, thus alloyed and diminished, it is taken hold of by the surface nature in an obscure reception and ignorant formation, and there is or can be by this cause a still further deviation and mixture. A twist is given, a wrong direction is imparted, a wrong application, a wrong formation, an erroneous result of what is in itself pure stuff and action of our spiritual being; a formation of consciousness is accordingly made which is a mixture of the psychic influence and its intimations jumbled with mental ideas and opinions, vital desires and urges, habitual physical tendencies. There coalesce too with the obscured soul-influence the ignorant though well-intentioned efforts of these external parts towards a higher direction; a mental ideation of a very mixed character, often obscure even in its idealism, sometimes even disastrously mistaken, a fervour and passion of the emotional being throwing up its spray and foam of feelings, sentiments, sentimentalisms, a dynamic enthusiasm of the life-parts, eager responses of the physical, the thrills and excitements of nerve and body,—all these influences coalesce in a composite formation which is frequently taken as the soul and its mixed and confused action for the soul-stir, for a psychic development and action or a realised inner influence. The psychic entity is itself free from stain or mixture, but what comes up from it is not protected by that immunity; therefore this confusion becomes possible.

Moreover, the psychic being, the soul personality in us, does not emerge full-grown and luminous; it evolves, passes through

a slow development and formation; its figure of being may be at first indistinct and may afterwards remain for a long time weak and undeveloped, not impure but imperfect: for it rests its formation, its dynamic self-building on the power of soul that has been actually and more or less successfully, against the resistance of the Ignorance and Inconscience, put forth in the evolution upon the surface. Its appearance is the sign of a soul emergence in Nature, and if that emergence is as yet small and defective, the psychic personality also will be stunted or feeble. It is too, by the obscurity of our consciousness, separated from its inner reality, in imperfect communication with its own source in the depths of the being; for the road is as yet ill-built, easily obstructed, the wires often cut or crowded with communications of another kind and proceeding from another origin: its power to impress what it receives upon the outer instruments is also imperfect; in its penury it has for most things to rely on these instruments and it forms its push to expression and action on their data and not solely on the unerring perceptions of the psychic entity. In these conditions it cannot prevent the true psychic light from being diminished or distorted in the mind into a mere idea or opinion, the psychic feeling in the heart into a fallible emotion or mere sentiment, the psychic will to action in the life parts into a blind vital enthusiasm or a fervid excitement: it even accepts these mistranslations for want of something better and tries to fulfil itself through them. For it is part of the work of the soul to influence mind and heart and vital being and turn their ideas, feelings, enthusiasms, dynamisms in the direction of what is divine and luminous; but this has to be done at first imperfectly, slowly and with a mixture. As the psychic personality grows stronger, it begins to increase its communion with the psychic entity behind it and improve its communications with the surface: it can transmit its intimations to the mind and heart and life with a greater purity and force; for it is more able to exercise a strong control and react against false mixtures; now more and more it makes itself distinctly felt as a power in the nature. But even so this evolution would be slow and long if left solely to the difficult automatic action of the evolutionary Energy; it is only when man awakes to the knowledge of the soul and feels a need to bring it to the front and make it the master of his life and action that a quicker conscious method of evolution intervenes and a psychic transformation becomes possible . . .

A first condition of the soul's complete emergence is a direct contact in the surface being with the spiritual Reality. Because it comes from that, the psychic element in us turns always towards whatever in phenomenal Nature seems to belong to a higher Reality and can be accepted as its sign and character. At first, it seeks this Reality through the good, the true, the beautiful, through all that is pure and fine and high and noble: but although this touch through outer signs and characters can modify and prepare the nature, it cannot entirely or most inwardly and profoundly change it. For such an inmost change the direct contact with the Reality itself is indispensable since nothing else can so deeply touch the foundations of our being and stir it or cast the nature



by its stir into a ferment of transmutation. Mental representations, emotional and dynamic figures have their use and value; Truth, Good and Beauty are in themselves primary and potent figures of the Reality, and even in their forms as seen by the mind, as felt by the heart, as realised in the life can be lines of an ascent: but it is in a spiritual substance and being of them and of itself that That which they represent has to come into our experience.

The soul may attempt to achieve this contact mainly through the thinking mind as intermediary and instrument; it puts a psychic impression on the intellect and the larger mind of insight and intuitional intelligence and turns them in that direction. At its highest the thinking mind is drawn always towards the impersonal; in its search it becomes conscious of a spiritual essence, an impersonal Reality which expresses itself in all these outward signs and characters but is more than any formation or manifesting figure. It feels something of which it becomes intimately and invisibly aware,—a supreme Truth, a supreme Good, a supreme Beauty, a supreme Purity, a supreme Bliss; it bears the increasing touch, less and less impalpable and abstract, more and more spiritually real and concrete, the touch and pressure of an Eternity and Infinity which is all this that is and more . . .

A second approach made by the soul to the direct contact is through the heart: this is its own more close and rapid way because its occult seat is there, just behind in the heart-centre, in close contact with the emotional being in us; it is consequently through the emotions that it can act best at the beginning with its native power, with its living force of concrete experience. It is through a love and adoration of the All-beautiful and All-blissful, the All-Good, the True, the spiritual Reality of love, that the approach is made; the aesthetic and emotional parts join together to offer the soul, the life, the whole nature to that which they worship . . .

For this penetration into the luminous crypt of the soul one has to get through all the intervening vital stuff to the psychic centre within us, however long, tedious or difficult may be the process. The method of detachment from the insistence of all mental and vital and physical claims and calls and impulsions, a concentration in the heart, austerity, self-purification and rejection of the old mind movements and life movements, rejection of the ego of desire, rejection of false needs and false habits, are all useful aids to this difficult passage: but the strongest, most central way is to found all such or other methods on a self-offering and surrender of ourselves and of our parts of nature to the Divine Being, the Ishwara. A strict obedience to the wise and intuitive leading of a Guide is also normal and necessary for all but a few specially gifted seekers . . .

As the crust of the outer nature cracks, as the walls of inner separation break down, the inner light gets through, the inner fire burns in the heart, the substance of the nature and the stuff of consciousness refine to a greater subtlety and purity, and the deeper psychic experiences, those which are not solely of an inner mental or inner vital character, become possible in this subtler, purer, finer substance; the soul begins to unveil itself, the psychic personality reaches its full stature. The soul, the psychic entity,

then manifests itself as the central being which upholds mind and life and body and supports all the other powers and functions of the Spirit; it takes up its greater function as the guide and ruler of the nature. A guidance, a governance begins from within which exposes every movement to the light of Truth, repels what is false, obscure, opposed to the divine realisation: every region of the being, every nook and corner of it, every movement, formation, direction, inclination of thought, will, emotion, sensation, action, reaction, motive, disposition, propensity, desire, habit of the conscious or subconscious physical, even the most concealed, camouflaged, mute, recondite, is lighted up with the unerring psychic light, their confusions dissipated, their tangles disentangled, their obscurities, deceptions, self-deceptions precisely indicated and removed; all is purified, set right, the whole nature harmonised, modulated in the psychic key, put in spiritual order. This process may be rapid or tardy according to the amount of obscurity and resistance still left in the nature, but it goes on unflinching so long as it is not complete. As a final result the whole conscious being is made perfectly apt for spiritual experience of every kind, turned towards spiritual truth of thought, feeling, sense, action, tuned to the right responses, delivered from the darkness and stubbornness of the tamasic inertia, the turbidities and turbulences and impurities of the rajasic passion and restless unharmonised kinetism, the enlightened rigidities and sattwic limitations or poised balancements of constructed equilibrium which are the character of the Ignorance.

This is the first result, but the second is a free inflow of all kinds of spiritual experience, experience of the Self, experience of the Ishwara and the Divine Shakti, experience of cosmic consciousness, a direct touch with cosmic forces and with the occult movements of universal Nature, a psychic sympathy and unity and inner communication and interchanges of all kinds with other beings and with Nature, illuminations of the mind by knowledge, illuminations of the heart by love and devotion and spiritual joy and ecstasy, illuminations of the sense and the body by higher experience, illuminations of dynamic action in the truth and largeness of a purified mind and heart and soul, the certitudes of the divine light and guidance, the joy and power of the divine force working in the will and the conduct. These experiences are the result of an opening outward of the inner and inmost being and nature; for then there comes into play the soul's power of unerring inherent consciousness, its vision, its touch on things which is superior to any mental cognition; there is there, native to the psychic consciousness in its pure working, an immediate sense of the world and its beings, a direct inner contact with them and a direct contact with the Self and with the Divine,—a direct knowledge, a direct sight of Truth and of all truths, a direct penetrating spiritual emotion and feeling, a direct intuition of right will and right action, a power to rule and to create an order of the being not by the gropings of the superficial self, but from within, from the inner truth of self and things and the occult realities of Nature. (*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 893-909)



Finding the psychic being

The Mother

Indeed the very act of genuine self-giving is its own immediate reward—it brings with it such happiness, such confidence, such security as nothing else can give. But till the self-giving is firmly psychic there will be disturbances, the interval of dark moments between bright ones. It is only the psychic that keeps on progressing in an unbroken line, its movement a continuous ascension. All other movements are broken and discontinuous.

And it is not till the psychic is felt as yourself that you can be an individual even; for it is the true self in you. Before the true self is known, you are a public place, not a being. There are so many clashing forces working in you; hence, if you wish to make real progress, know your own being which is in constant union with the Divine. Then alone will transformation be possible. All the other parts of your nature are ignorant: the mind, for instance, often commits the mistake of thinking that every brilliant idea is also a luminous idea. It can with equal vigour trump up arguments for and against God: it has no infallible sense of the truth. The vital is generally impressed by any show of power and is willing to see in it the Godlike. It is only the psychic which has a just discrimination: it is directly aware of the supreme Presence, it infallibly distinguishes between the divine and the undivine. If you have even for a moment contacted it, you will carry with you a conviction about the Divine which nothing will shake.

How, you ask me, are we to know our true being? Ask for it, aspire after it, want it as you want nothing else. Most of you here are influenced by it, but it should be more than an influence, you should be able to feel identified with it. All urge for perfection comes from it, but you are unaware of the source, you are not collaborating with it knowingly, you are not in identification with its light. Do not think I refer to the emotional part of you when I speak of the psychic. Emotion belongs to the higher vital, not to the pure psychic. The psychic is a steady flame that burns in you, soaring towards the Divine and carrying with it a sense of strength which breaks down all oppositions. When you are identified with it you have the feeling of the divine truth—then you cannot help feeling also that the whole world is ignorantly walking on its head with its feet in the air!

You must learn to unite what you call your individual self with your true psychic individuality. Your present individuality is a very mixed thing, a series of changes which yet preserves a certain continuity, a certain sameness or identity of vibration in the midst of all flux. It is almost like a river which is never the same and yet has a certain definiteness and persistence of its own. Your normal self is merely a shadow of your true individuality which you will realise only when this normal individual which is differently poised at different times, now in the mental, then in the vital, at other times in the physical, gets into contact with the psychic and feels it as its real being. Then you will be one, noth-



ing will shake or disturb you, you will make steady and lasting progress... (CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 124-125)

Surrender is the decision taken to hand over the responsibility of your life to the Divine. Without this decision nothing is at all possible; if you do not surrender, the Yoga is entirely out of the question. Everything else comes naturally after it, for the whole process starts with surrender. You can surrender either through knowledge or through devotion. You may have a strong intuition that the Divine alone is the truth and a luminous conviction that without the Divine you cannot manage. Or you may have a spontaneous feeling that this line is the only way of being happy, a strong psychic desire to belong exclusively to the Divine: "I do not belong to myself," you say, and give up the responsibility of your being to the Truth. Then comes self-offering: "Here I am, a creature of various qualities, good and bad, dark and enlightened. I offer myself as I am to you, take me up with all my ups and downs, conflicting impulses and tendencies—do whatever you like with me." In the course of your self-offering, you start unifying your being around what has taken the first decision—the central psychic will. All the jarring elements of your nature have to be harmonised, they have to be taken up one after another and unified with the central being. You may offer yourself to the Divine with a spontaneous movement, but it is not possible to give yourself effectively without this unification.

The more you are unified, the more you are able to realize self-giving. And once the self-giving is complete, consecration follows: it is the crown of the whole process of realisation, the last step of the gradation, after which there is no more trouble and everything runs smoothly. But you must not forget that you cannot become integrally consecrated at once. You are often deluded into such a belief when, for a day or two, you have a strong movement of a particular kind. You are led to hope that everything else will automatically follow in its wake; but in fact if you become the least bit self-complacent you retard your own advance. For your being is full of innumerable tendencies at war with one another—almost different personalities, we may say.

When one of them gives itself to the Divine, the others come up and refuse their allegiance. "We have not given ourselves,"



they cry, and start clamouring for their independence and expression. Then you bid them be quiet and show them the Truth. Patiently you have to go round your whole being, exploring each nook and corner, facing all those anarchic elements in you which are waiting for their psychological moment to come up. And it is only when you have made the entire round of your mental, vital and physical nature, persuaded everything to give itself to the Divine and thus achieved an absolute unified consecration that you put an end to your difficulties. Then indeed yours is a glorious walk towards transformation, for you no longer go from darkness to knowledge but from knowledge to knowledge, light to light, happiness to happiness....

The complete consecration is undoubtedly not an easy matter, and it might take an almost indefinitely long time if you had to do it all by yourself, by your own independent effort. But when the Divine's Grace is with you it is not exactly like that. With a little push from the Divine now and then, a little push in this direction and in that, the work becomes comparatively quite easy. Of course the length of time depends on each individual, but it can be very much shortened if you make a really firm resolve. Resolution is the one thing required—resolution is the master-key. (CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 126-127)

The starting-point is to seek in yourself that which is independent of the body and the circumstances of life, which is not born of the mental formation that you have been given, the language you speak, the habits and customs of the environment in which you live, the country where you are born or the age to which you belong. You must find, in the depths of your being, that which carries in it a sense of universality, limitless expansion, unbroken continuity. Then you decentralise, extend and widen yourself; you begin to live in all things and in all beings; the barriers separating individuals from each other break down. You think in their thoughts, vibrate in their sensations, feel in their feelings, live in the life of all. What seemed inert suddenly becomes full of life, stones quicken, plants feel and will and suffer, animals speak in a language more or less inarticulate, but clear and expressive; everything is animated by a marvellous consciousness without time or limit. And this is only one aspect of the psychic realisation; there are others, many others. All help you to go beyond the barriers of your egoism, the walls of your external personality, the impotence of your reactions and the incapacity of your will.

But, as I have already said, the path to that realization is long and difficult, strewn with snares and problems to be solved, which demand an unflinching determination. It is like the explorer's trek through virgin forest in quest of an unknown land, of some great discovery. The psychic being is also a great discovery which requires at least as much fortitude and endurance as the discovery of new continents. A few simple words of advice may be useful to one who has resolved to undertake it.

The first and perhaps the most important point is that the mind is incapable of judging spiritual things. All those who have written on this subject have said so; but very few are those who

have put it into practice. And yet, in order to proceed on the path, it is absolutely indispensable to abstain from all mental opinion and reaction.

Give up all personal seeking for comfort, satisfaction, enjoyment or happiness. Be only a burning fire for progress, take whatever comes to you as an aid to your progress and immediately make whatever progress is required.

Try to take pleasure in all you do, but never do anything for the sake of pleasure.

Never get excited, nervous or agitated. Remain perfectly calm in the face of all circumstances. And yet be always alert to discover what progress you still have to make and lose no time in making it.

Never take physical happenings at their face value. They are always a clumsy attempt to express something else, the true thing which escapes our superficial understanding.

Never complain of the behaviour of anyone, unless you have the power to change in his nature what makes him act in this way; and if you have the power, change him instead of complaining.

Whatever you do, never forget the goal which you have set before you. There is nothing great or small once you have set out on this great discovery; all things are equally important and can either hasten or delay its success. Thus before you eat, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the food you are about to eat may bring your body the substance it needs to serve as a solid basis for your effort towards the great discovery, and give it the energy for persistence and perseverance in the effort.

Before you go to sleep, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the sleep may restore your fatigued nerves, bring calm and quietness to your brain so that on waking you may, with renewed vigour, begin again your journey on the path of the great discovery.

Before you act, concentrate in the will that your action may help or at least in no way hinder your march forward towards the great discovery.

When you speak, before the words come out of your mouth, concentrate just long enough to check your words and allow only those that are absolutely necessary to pass, only those that are not in any way harmful to your progress on the path of the great discovery.

To sum up, never forget the purpose and goal of your life. The will for the great discovery should be always there above you, above what you do and what you are, like a huge bird of light dominating all the movements of your being.

Before the untiring persistence of your effort, an inner door will suddenly open and you will emerge into a dazzling splendour that will bring you the certitude of immortality, the concrete experience that you have always lived and always shall live, that external forms alone perish and that these forms are, in relation to what you are in reality, like clothes that are thrown away when worn out. Then you will stand erect, freed from all chains, and instead of advancing laboriously under the weight of circumstances imposed upon you by Nature, which you had to endure and bear if you did not want to be crushed by them, you will be able to walk on, straight and firm, conscious of your destiny, master of your life. (CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 32-35)



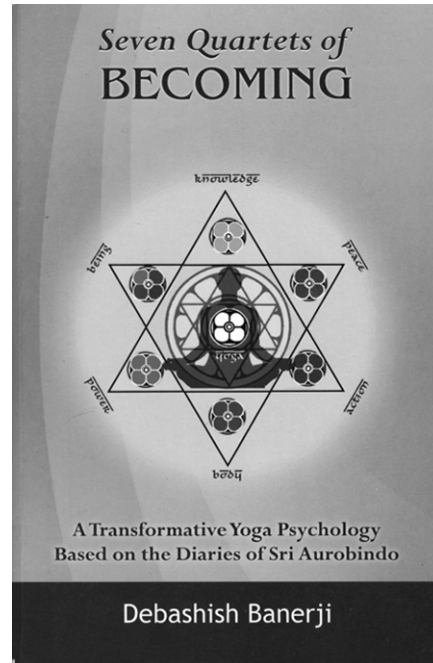
Book Review

Seven quartets of becoming by Debashish Banerji

Reviewed by Larry Seidlitz

This is a difficult book, but one well worth the effort of reading. It has three main aims, all complex and deep: the first is to present the aims and nature of Sri Aurobindo's yoga as described in his *Record of Yoga*, his yogic diary; the second is to examine his Integral Yoga in the wider context of Indian yogas and spiritual philosophies; and the third is to examine certain facets of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga in relation to the concepts articulated by various Western philosophers. There is no doubt that the author has an excellent grasp of all three of these difficult subjects. Viewing the work from what I might claim to be a fairly strong grounding in Sri Aurobindo's thought, but not quite as strong in Western philosophy, I would say that the author was quite successful with the first and second aims, but less so with the third. I often had difficulty following the author's comparisons with Western philosophical and psychological concepts, in part because there were just so many different philosophers and philosophies discussed in relation to such a wide assortment of ideas that it was hard to get an overall perspective on all this material, and in part because the descriptions of Western philosophical concepts seemed highly abstract and condensed. In contrast, I found the parts describing the concepts in the *Record of Yoga* much more accessible, and though the language used to describe them may also be difficult for readers less acquainted with them, these concepts are presented more leisurely, with fuller explanations, and so they are easier to digest. In addition, the structure of the Integral Yoga described in the *Record of Yoga* is nicely organized into "seven quartets," and this structure helps in comprehending it overall and in relating the parts to each other. The author has capitalized on this guiding structure by including helpful tables that summarize and organize the ideas.

Let me elaborate a bit more on each of the three main aims of the book. The *Record of Yoga* was Sri Aurobindo's diary of his yoga that he wrote primarily between 1912 and 1920. The manuscripts that comprise the *Record of Yoga* were found relatively recently and first published as a book in 2001. These personal diary notes were presented in a difficult form with much Sanskrit terminology, brief notes on various experiences, and sometimes more systematic reviews of his ongoing progress in the various



The seven quartets are the quartets of Perfection, Peace, Power, Knowledge, the Body, Being, and Action, which are well described in a chapter devoted to each.

a chapter devoted to each. There follows an important chapter called "Attitudes of Self-Discipline," which discusses major threads running through many of the quartets and integrating them, attitudes such as aspiration, sincerity, purification, equality, constant remembrance and surrender. Another chapter enlarges upon the quartet of pure Being and its relation to Knowledge, discussing concepts such as Brahman, the one and the many, the personal and the impersonal, and the Master of the Yoga. The final chapter elaborates further on the quartets of action, power and enjoyment, all of which are connected to the life-affirming nature of the yoga.

The Synthesis of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo's main formal text on the Integral Yoga, is organized and formulated quite differently from the *Record of Yoga*. Though most of the components of the seven quartets appear there, they are presented in a different language and organizational structure. Some of these components are also elaborated in Sri Aurobindo's other works, and the author refers to these works as he discusses and explains the system of yogic practice found in these early diaries of Sri Aurobindo. In summary, this book successfully renders the main concepts of the *Record of Yoga* accessible and understandable, and thus gives a useful new perspective on the Integral Yoga.

The second stated aim was to place Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga in the wider context of Indian Yoga. This seemed to me a minor endeavor of the book, with relatively few pages devoted to it, and yet I was struck at times with new insights about the Inte-

aspects of his sadhana. Some other writings which helped to describe the overall structure of his sadhana were included as an Introduction to the *Record of Yoga*. In the present book, the first aim has been to present the overall structure of this yoga, a concise yet accessible explanation of the 28 parts of the seven quartets, some of which are further elaborated into additional components. The seven quartets are the quartets of Perfection, Peace, Power, Knowledge, the Body, Being, and Action, which are well described in



gral Yoga's relation with the other Indian yogas and philosophies. For example, the first chapter describes Sri Aurobindo's yoga in relation to Vedanta, Sankhya, Tantra and Patanjali's Yoga and illuminates these relations with its twin goals of *mukti* (liberation) and *bhukti* (enjoyment). These two goals are found again and again in the structure of the seven quartets, and in several of the quartets two aspects are focused on *mukti*, and two aspects are focused on *bhukti*, the latter being associated with the acceptance and divinization of earthly life. The book also covers many of the central concepts of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy as described in *The Life Divine*; it is not focused exclusively on yoga or yogic practice. These philosophical concepts, which are not merely concepts but spiritual experiences or potentially verifiable experiential realities, are also illuminated in many of the comparisons with the Western philosophies. At some points in my reading I was struck more profoundly than ever with how new and radically different Sri Aurobindo's teaching is from the traditional yogas which tend to focus exclusively on *mukti*, or spiritual liberation.

The third aim of the book focuses on showing how Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga compares with and relates to various Western philosophies, especially those of Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze, with a special emphasis on the last, who articulated many concepts similar to those of Sri Aurobindo. While it was obvious that the author has a close familiarity with these writings and is facile at extracting their primary ideas and comparing them and locating them in the development of philosophical thought, it seemed to me that he assumes too much from the reader in this respect. Although the introduction to the book provides a brief introduction to these philosophers and their related conceptions, I felt that there was a vast reservoir of knowledge hidden below and behind his various assertions about their philosophies which remained unarticulated and thus might often leave readers like myself scratching their heads. There is also a specific style of language and terminology used in these discourses in which the author is clearly expert, but which is a bit daunting to take in alongside the complexity of terms and conceptions articulated in the *Record of Yoga*. Still, I would not say that this material was completely intractable; I did learn useful things about these philosophies, and, even more importantly, was struck by their profundity and the similarities that many of them have to Sri Aurobindo's views on various matters. In addition, it is quite likely that many readers would have had a better preparation in Western philosophy than I, and with a good introductory background in these philosophies might find these comparisons more illuminating. I do believe that this third aim of the book is an important and necessary one, for it relates Sri Aurobindo's thought and yoga to present-day ideas and philosophies, and thus to modern humanity's self-conception and its conception of the world and its future. It is to be hoped that in future works the author might articulate these relations of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga to Western philosophy in a more elaborated manner, more accessible to lay readers.

The poetry room

The adoration of the Divine Mother

Even while he stood on being's naked edge
And all the passion and seeking of his soul
Faced their extinction in some featureless Vast,
The Presence he yearned for suddenly drew close.
Across the silence of the ultimate Calm,
Out of a marvellous Transcendence' core,
A body of wonder and translucency
As if a sweet mystic summary of her self
Escaping into the original Bliss
Had come enlarged out of eternity,
Someone came infinite and absolute.
A being of wisdom, power and delight,
Even as a mother draws her child to her arms,
Took to her breast Nature and world and soul.
Abolishing the signless emptiness,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless hush,
Piercing the limitless Unknowable,
Into the liberty of the motionless depths
A beautiful and felicitous lustre stole.
The Power, the Light, the Bliss no word can speak
Imaged itself in a surprising beam
And built a golden passage to his heart
Touching through him all longing sentient things.
A moment's sweetness of the All-Beautiful
Cancelled the vanity of the cosmic whirl.
A Nature throbbing with a Heart divine
Was felt in the unconscious universe;
It made the breath a happy mystery.

...

This Light comes not by struggle or by thought;
In the mind's silence the Transcendent acts
And the hushed heart hears the unuttered Word.
A vast surrender was his only strength.
A Power that lives upon the heights must act,
Bring into life's closed room the Immortal's air
And fill the finite with the Infinite.
All that denies must be torn out and slain
And crushed the many longings for whose sake
We lose the One for whom our lives were made.
Now other claims had hushed in him their cry:
Only he longed to draw her presence and power
Into his heart and mind and breathing frame;
Only he yearned to call for ever down
Her healing touch of love and truth and joy
Into the darkness of the suffering world.
His soul was freed and given to her alone.

—Sri Aurobindo (From *Savitri*)



Death, my servant

Clutch me, O Death, with thy strong hand,
Crush my bones to finest sand,
Bring darkness down with your blackest cape,
And through your fingers I shall escape.

Bring cyclone, fire, tsunami and strife,
Break molecules giving my cells their life,
Consume in flame all matter in me,
Yet still will my vast Being be.

Tear from atoms their orbiting stuff,
Smash protons to subatomic fluff,
Destroy quarks to substance's end;
Even so, my I won't rend.

Aloof and careless in the ever transcendent,
In purple clouds of bliss resplendent,
With wider eyes of inner knowing
My love to all is freely flowing.

From realms of the ultimate Truth Divine
I trace the path of my spiral line
Winding through lives again to Earth,
Fetching more wisdom with each birth.

So Death, my servant, you are not my end;
My soul escapes to come again
To live and laugh and learn and love,
Linking this below to that above.

—Bill Leon

Playing catch with my psychic being or If Rumi played baseball

To my child,
"Catch!" you said,
The ball placed in my hand.

Later throws were longer,
Harder, tossed high.
I leapt for every one.
Some hit me in the head.
Needed that!
Some went down the hill
Into the woods;
I went searching...
For years.

Sometimes I forgot about the ball;
Too busy working, worrying, wailing...

Then! From nowhere:
"Catch!" you shouted.
Whirling, diving
(In my suit on the sidewalk)
I caught the ball,
Joyous in tattered wool.

This time, I said, "Let's play!"
You responded as the ball;
Inside we crawled
And bounced as one.

Who's the thrower?
Who's the catcher?
Who's the ball?

To not know is bliss.
There is only the game.

—Bill Leon

Shifts in consciousness

From matter rock-plated to the first cell created—
Shifts in consciousness?

As complexity built with axis a tilt—
Toward a shift in consciousness.

Minerals, acids, energy fused and grouped
Deep down inside that Primordial Soup—
Playing their part in the shifts of consciousness.

The forces of gravity met an orbital cavity—
Did they collaborate in a shift in consciousness?

Seven million years emerging out of Africa
Wandering tribes' with a need to survive
Ice ages, floods and droughts—
Many shifts in consciousness.

Tools and fire, humanity's desire—from era's unknown
There were shifts in consciousness—

From the earliest times through ages of dark—to renaissance
revivals—
Humanity embarks on shifts in consciousness.

The conditions could be right, even on this very night,
To experience our own—divine shift in consciousness.

—Dian Kiser



The meaning of man¹

*Take courage; for the race of man is divine.
The Golden Verses*

Dear and fair as Earth may be
Not from out her womb are we,—
Like an elder sister only, like a foster-mother, she,
For we come of heavenly lineage, of a pure undying race,
We who took the poppied potion of our life, and quaffing deep
Move enchanted now forever in the shadow world of sleep,
In the vast and lovely vision that is wrought of time and space.

Overhead the sun and moon
Shining as the gates of birth
Give to each a common boon, —
All the joy of earth;
Mountains lit with moving light,
Forest, cavern, cloud and river,
Ebb and flow of day and night
Around the world forever.

These and all the works of man may he who will behold,
Mighty shapes of bygone beauty, songs of beaten gold,
Starlike thoughts that once, in ages gone, were found by seer-sages,
All the throng'd and murmuring Past, the life men loved of old.
Yet sometimes at the birth of night when hours of heat and
splendour
Melt away in darkness, and the flaming sun has set
Across the brooding soul will sweep, like music sad and tender,
Sudden waves of almost passionate regret,
For then the hills and meadowlands, the trees and flowerful
grasses,
All the world of wonder that our eyes have gazed upon,
Seems remote and mournful, as a rainbow when it passes
Leaves the heart lamenting for the beauty come and gone,
And in the deep that is the soul there surges up a cry
'Whence are all the starry legions traversing the sky?
Whence the olden planets and the sun and moon and earth?
Out of what came all of these and out of what came I?'
And far away within the same unfathomable deep
Comes an answer rolling 'Earth and moon and sun,
All that is, that has been, or that ever time shall reap,
Is but moving home again, with mighty labours done,
The Many to the Everlasting One.'

And this is the meaning of man,
The task of the soul,
The labour of worlds, and the plan
That is set for the whole,
For the spark of the spirit imprisoned within it,
In all things one and the same,
Aeon by aeon and minute by minute,

Is longing to leap into flame,
To shatter the limits of life and be lost in a glory intense
and profound
As the soul with a cry goes out into music and seeks to be
one with the sound.

For as those that are sunken deep
In the green dim ocean of sleep,
In a thousand shapes for a thousand ages the one great
Spirit is bound.

The air we inhale and the sea,
The warm brown earth and the sun,
Came forth at the Word of the One

From the same First Mother as we,
And now, as of old when the world began
The stars of the night are the kindred of man,
For all things move to a single goal,
The giant sun or the thinking soul.
Ah what though the Tree whose rise and fall
Of sap is fed from the Spirit of All,
With suns for blossoms and planets for leaves,
Be vaster yet than the mind conceives?
Earth is a leaf on the boundless Tree,
And the unborn soul of the earth are we.

O man is a hungering exiled people, a host in an unknown land,
A wandering mass in the vast with only a black horizon to face,
Yet still, though we toil for a time in the heat over measureless
deserts of sand

The longing for beauty that shines in the soul is the guiding-
star of the race.

It is this that alone may redeem
A world ignoble with strife,
This only brings all that we dream
From the shattered chaos of life.

And this that forever shall spur us and lead us from peak unto
peak on the way
Till body and spirit be wedded in one and the long Night fall on
the Day,

And all the sonorous music of time, the hills and the woods and
the wind and the sea,

The one great song of the whole creation, of all that is and that
yet shall be,

Chanted aloud as a paeon of joy by the Being whose home is
the vast

Shall tremble away in silence, and all be gone at the last,
Save only afar in the Heart of the Singer of whom it was
chanted and heard

Remembrance left of the music as a sunset-fire in the west,
Remembrance left of the mighty Enchanted Palace that rose at
His Word,

This, and a joy everlasting, an immense inviolate rest.

—Clifford Bax

¹From Alan Jacobs (Ed.), *Poetry for the Spirit*. London: Watkins, 2002.



Apropos

Confident of His grace, expect His will; let Him lead; though hidden be the bourne, see Him in all that happens; that fulfill for which thou wert born. —Sri Aurobindo

Always be kind and you will be free from suffering, always be contented and happy, and you will radiate your quiet happiness. —The Mother

A person does not have to be behind bars to be a prisoner. People can be prisoners of their own concepts and ideas. They can be slaves to their own selves. —Maharaji

If you could only keep quiet, clear of memories and expectations, you would be able to discern the beautiful pattern of events. It's your restlessness that causes chaos. —Sri Nisargadatta Maharaja

Relate with others, but relate with yourself also. Love others, but love yourself also. Go out! —the world is beautiful, adventurous; it is a challenge, it enriches. Go out fearlessly—there is nothing to lose, there is everything to gain. —Osho

Everything in your life is there as a vehicle for your transformation. Use it! —Ram Dass

To offer no resistance to life is to be in a state of grace, ease, and lightness. This state is then no longer dependent upon things being in a certain way, good or bad. It seems almost paradoxical, yet when your inner dependency on form is gone, the general conditions of your life, the outer forms, tend to improve greatly. —Eckhart Tolle

In daily life we must see that it is not happiness that makes us grateful, but gratefulness that makes us happy. —Brother David Steindl-Rast

That best portion of a good man's life; his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love. —William Wordsworth

Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love. —Martin Luther King, Jr.

When you demand nothing of the world, nor of God, when you want nothing, seek nothing, expect nothing, then the supreme state will come to you uninvited and unexpected. —Sri Nisargadatta Maharaja

All you have shall some day be given; Therefore give now, that the season of giving may be yours and not your inheritors. —Kahlil Gibran

Never look down on anybody unless you're helping them up. —Jesse Jackson

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared. —Buddha

Nothing is so strong as gentleness, and nothing is so gentle as true strength. —Ralph Sockman

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around. —Leo Buscaglia

Better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness. —Chinese Proverb

Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace, and gratitude. —Denis Waitley

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom. —Marcel Proust

Be glad of life, because it gives you the chance to love and to work and to play and to look up at the stars. —Henry Van Dyke

You cannot be truthful if you are not courageous. You cannot be loving if you are not courageous. You cannot be trusting if you are not courageous. You cannot enter into reality if you are not courageous. Hence courage comes first... and everything else follows. —Osho

Love in its essence is spiritual fire. —Seneca

I laugh when I hear that the fish in the water is thirsty. You don't grasp the fact that what is most alive of all is inside your own house; and you walk from one holy city to the next with a confused look! Kabir will tell you the truth: go wherever you like, to Calcutta or Tibet; if you can't find where your soul is hidden, for you the world will never be real! —Kabir

It is always the false that makes you suffer, the false desires and fears, the false values and ideas, the false relationships between people. Abandon the false and you are free of pain; truth makes happy, truth liberates. —Sri Nisargadatta Maharaja

It is the unseen and the spiritual in people that determines the outward and the actual. —Oswald Chambers

Our personal consumer choices have ecological, social, and spiritual consequences. It is time to re-examine some of our deeply held notions that underlie our lifestyles. —David Suzuki

The Lord is in me, the Lord is in you, as life is in every seed, put false pride away and seek the Lord within. —Kabir

To live content with small means; to seek elegance rather than luxury; and refinement rather than fashion; to be worthy, not respectable; and wealthy, not rich; to study hard, think quietly, talk gently, act frankly; to listen to stars and birds, to babes and sages, with open heart; to bear all cheerfully, do all bravely, await occasion, hurry never; in a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious grow up through the common. This is to be my symphony. —William Ellery Channing