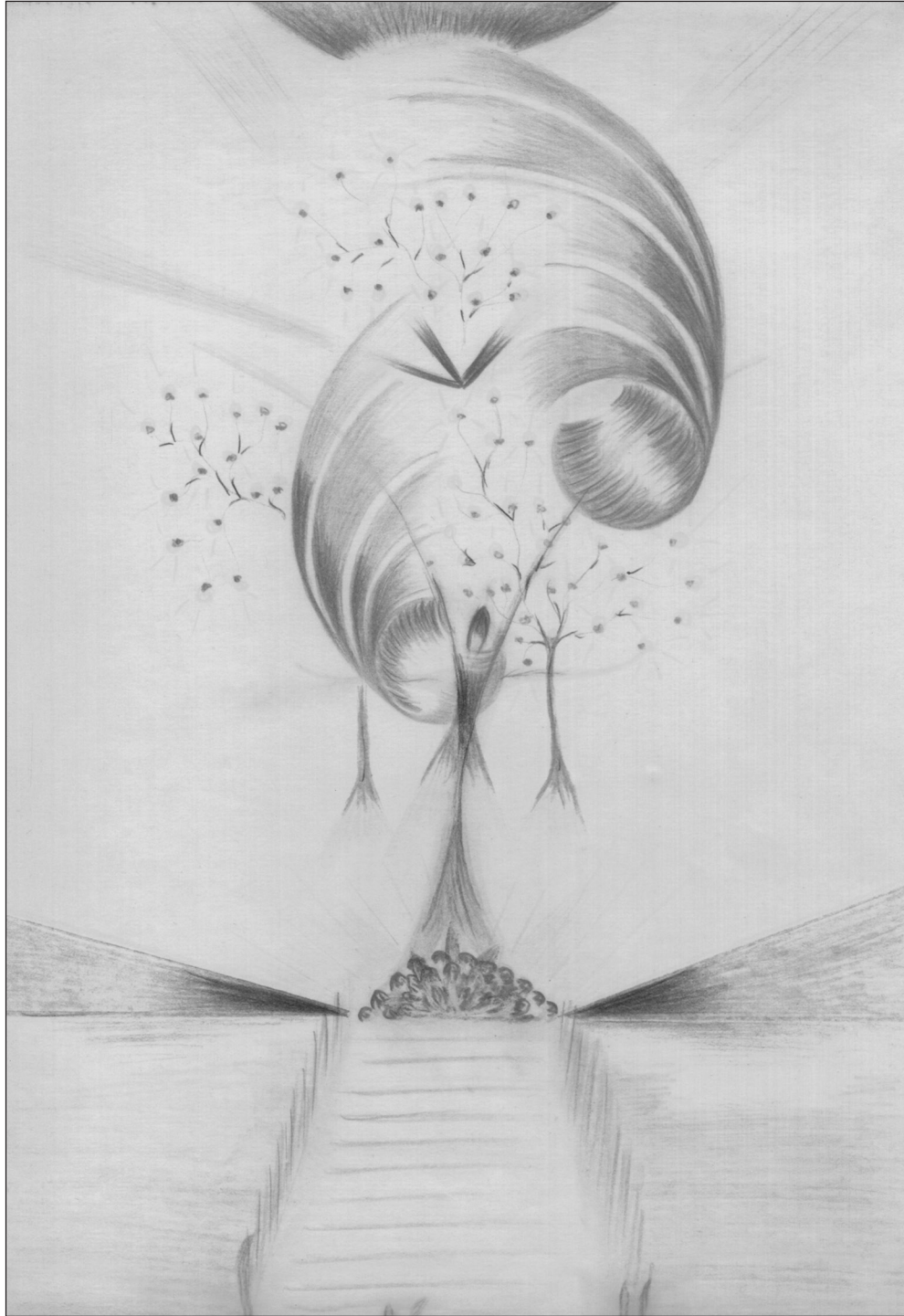


# Collaboration

Winter/Spring 2014

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 38, No. 3



**Amidhar's story by Shyam Kumari •**

**Two special darshans of the Mother by Narad Eggenberger •**

**Land and spirit: An American yoga for the 21st Century by John Robert Cornell •**

**Being Present by James Anderson • On Buddha and love by Pravir Malik**

**Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Book Review • Poetry • Apropos**



## About the cover

Title: Mahalakshmi Invoked: the Descent of Riches. This is a greyscale reproduction of a color painting (pencils with watercolor) by Mirajyoti (mjyoti@auroville.org.in) who has lived in Auroville since 2001 and formerly lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It is part of a collection in soft pastels which has been set to music on a DVD which is available from the artist (mjyoti@auroville.org.in). Mirajyoti is also an editor and she coedited the popular book *The Hierarchy of Minds* with Prem Sobel, among other works.

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## From the office of Collaboration

In this issue, our first featured Chronicle is a previously unpublished story from Shyam Kumari's series of interviews with disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In this extraordinary story, Amidhar recounts his early spiritual practices and experiences leading up to Sri Aurobindo's personal invitation to come to the Ashram to test for himself the truth of the Integral Yoga. The story recounts Amidhar's remarkable childhood associations with several advanced souls and realized yogi's, and his own remarkable spiritual experiences and realizations before coming to the Ashram. This is followed by a second Chronicle by Narad, who recounts two unique darshans he had of the Mother—the first during a special choir performance he organized at the Samadhi for her to listen to from her room, and the second when he was trimming branches high up in the Service Tree just outside her window.

We follow these with an Essay by John Robert Cornell, the first part of a previously unpublished book which will be presented in installments over the next several issues. Titled "Land and spirit, An American yoga for the 21st Century," this book explores the relation between nature and spirit that John Robert discovered while traveling and trekking in the American West with his wife Karen. In this first installment, the Prologue describes the backdrop to this inner and outer journey—the fragmented and disconnected surface life of American society. Then in the first chapter, "Song of the land," John Robert initiates us into those inner dimensions of the land and of nature which they discovered in South India, in the writings of various nature writers, and during a sojourn into Yosemite National Park, before setting out on their journey into the sacred lands of the American Southwest. The story will be continued in future issues of *Collaboration*.

This is followed by the essay "Being Present" by James Anderson, which discusses an important secret towards unity and wholeness: being present in the moment, and "being attentive and alert to what is going on inside." James shows how much of what we seem to be is built of *past* habits. These attachments can be progressively undone by learning to stay present in the moment and attending to one's bodily sensations; these provide a support and gateway to states of greater spiritual alignment and health.

Next, a short essay by Pravir Malik uses the example of the life of the Buddha to explain how our distress is a sign from "the Love that exists behind all" that something in us is out of alignment with the deeper intention that this Love is seeking to establish.

We open this issue with Current Affairs, which has articles on events at four of the U.S. Sri Aurobindo centers. In AV Almanac we present three articles—on sustainability, Auroville education, and the use of art for therapy and bridging communities in Auroville. In Source Material we have extended excerpts from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on surrender and self-giving. We also have a Book Review on a collection of academic articles on Sri Aurobindo edited by Peter Heehs, a selection of fine spiritual poetry, and we close the issue with a series of inspiring Apropos quotations.

## Artists

*Karen Cornell has been drawing and painting since childhood. She was a graphic artist in the software industry for many years. She specializes in computer graphics, pen and ink, and watercolor.*

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**Submissions:** *Collaboration* welcomes writing, photos, and artwork relevant to the Integral Yoga and spirituality. Submit material by email to: [editor@collaboration.org](mailto:editor@collaboration.org); or by post to *Collaboration*, 2715 W. Kettleman Lane, Suite 203-174, Lodi, CA 95242 USA. *Collaboration* cannot be held responsible for loss or damage of unsolicited material. Letters and articles may be edited for style and space considerations.

**About SAA:** The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports 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; Margaret Phanes and Angelo Salerno, directors.

**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

### Four projects of the Crestone Solar Corps receive funding

by Pavita Decorah

The Crestone Solar Corps, initiated in 2008 by the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, has been the recipient of support and funds from the Saguache County Tax Revenue Grant in four grant cycles. It's wonderful to live in a county that gives our youth, renewable energy and hands-on education a real chance in the San Luis Valley. There are limited opportunities for young people in our sparsely populated and spacious valley, and it is with deep gratitude that we acknowledge the forward looking generosity of Saguache County.

Conceived as a model for non-profits who wish to collaborate with funders, students and unemployed youth to improve energy efficiency and renewable technology skills in our community, students are paid to earn-as-they learn and wages are a much-needed inflow of money.

For our first project, charter school students retrofitted an old potting shed into a greenhouse where little starter plants are already growing, protected and sunlit. The second two projects paid students who learned to sew and install insulated curtains. Two solariums, one on Savitri House, another on Solar Bridge and the greenhouse received curtains. These houses are warmer through the winter and during the summer the curtains provide privacy, incoming solar control and living space for workshops, study groups and special events.

The fourth project was completed last fall, as unemployed youth worked hard installing radiant heat in our Meditation Dome. The dome is open for meditation, and since it is close to town, we consider it a community resource. The Sri Aurobindo Learning Center is also grateful to the many students who worked hard and accomplished project goals in cooperation and good-spirits. It has been fun!

### Update from the Institute for Wholistic Education

by Santosh Krinsky

The Institute for Wholistic Education, in collaboration with Lotus Press, is continuing its development and publishing of study guides for Sri Aurobindo's major writings. *Readings in Sri Aurobindo's Essays on the Gita*, Vol. 1 is now being prepped and printed and should be in stock in March 2014. This book covers the First Series of *Essays on the Gita* and is around 376 pages. As a special offer to Sri Aurobindo study centers located in the USA, we are of-



Ben Potter, Abby Swartz and David Burril (from left to right), installing radiant floor heat in the meditation dome at the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Learning Center)

ferring one copy to each center that requests one from us for your library and potential use as a study guide. This is the 6th book in the series, the prior books consisting of 3 volumes of *Readings in Sri Aurobindo's The Life Divine*, as well as one volume each of *Readings in Rebirth and Karma* by Sri Aurobindo and *Readings in The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo. Any center in the USA which has not yet requested and received their free copies for any of these six volumes should contact us at [santoshk@msn.com](mailto:santoshk@msn.com)

The book is available through distribution for sale as well. Kindle versions are being made available through Amazon for those who use either a Kindle Reader or Kindle APP on any other platform. The books are also available on Barnes and Noble and Google Books (epub) format for those who use Nook or ipad or other epub based readers.

The current book of Sri Aurobindo's being focused on is *Essays on the Gita* with daily posts at <http://sriaurobindostudies.wordpress.com>. Currently we are in the midst of Chapter 6 of the Second Series of *Essays on the Gita*. All prior posts remain archived and accessible for those who want to study earlier chapters, as well as any of the earlier volumes in the series.

Long-time devotee Gary Millar has developed a photo-essay on the Vedic tradition in the light of Sri Aurobindo in connection with an ancient Vedic culture in Nepal at the foot of Annapurna Mountain. The institute has collaborated with him to bring this book out as a full-color e-book which is currently available on Amazon Kindle under the title *Vedic Nature Yoga*. The book is lavishly illustrated with incredible photography and accompanying commentary. The color edition works on any of the modern e-book readers, or on computers that have a Kindle Reading App or are compliant with Kindle. The book is also being made available through google books and Barnes & Noble e-readers in an "epub" edition. Gary currently resides in Nepal and is developing his next book to explore the elements of the living vedic tradition



in which he is immersed. Gary resided at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India for a number of years before his research took him to the Himalayas of Nepal.

The Institute also sponsors classes on reiki, levels 1, 2 and 3, conducted by Karuna Krinsky. The schedule is regularly updated and can be found at [www.reikiteacher.org](http://www.reikiteacher.org)

The Institute makes "distance learning" courses in Ayurveda available as part of its ongoing activities. Information can be found at [www.wholisticinstitute.org](http://www.wholisticinstitute.org). In addition to an extensive written course and textbooks, students receive regular support from our staff to work through the material and evaluate and encourage their progress.

The Institute has scheduled several sessions for viewing DVD talks on a variety of subjects by Sri M.P. Pandit. Those interested in viewing these DVD's should contact us for further information and current schedule. We also maintain a website with lectures, mantras and annotated book information about Sri M.P. Pandit at [www.mppandit.com](http://www.mppandit.com)

The Fall 2013 issue of EVOLVE Magazine published by New Leaf featured an article on Karma that highlighted Sri Aurobindo's *Rebirth and Karma*. The Center has acquired extra copies of the magazine and any Center wishing to have a copy should let us know and we can arrange to send it along.

The Institute has also developed a collaboration with the Kauai Hindu Monastery (and publisher of *Hinduism Today*) and will be submitting quotations from Sri Aurobindo for various themes they disseminate through their readership. *Hinduism Today* did a feature article in their publisher advertiser newsletter in mid-2013 featuring the work of the center and the inspiration we receive from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for integration of spirituality into our daily lives. This developing relationship is the fruit of many years of contact and annual visits to the Monastery for the last 6-7 years.

Contact: Institute for Wholistic Education, 3425 Patzke Lane, Racine, WI 53405. 262-619-1798; [www.wholisticinstitute.org](http://www.wholisticinstitute.org) and [www.lotuspress.com](http://www.lotuspress.com).

## Cultural Integration Fellowship, San Francisco

by Rita Chaudhuri Pease

Inspired by the teachings of Sri Aurobindo which brought the highest values of East and West together in a creative synthesis, the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF) was founded in 1951 by Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri and Mrs. Bina Chaudhuri to promote a dynamic integration of the cultural and spiritual values of all people. Sri Aurobindo had personally guided Haridas Chaudhuri in the writing of his doctoral dissertation on Integral Idealism, taking the time to review and comment on his work. It was also at the personal nomination of Sri Aurobindo that Dr. Chaudhuri came to the United States to teach at the American

Academy of Asian Studies and to offer public lectures on integral philosophy. CIF evolved from the gatherings at these public lectures and established itself as the first 'Ashram' in San Francisco. After Dr. Chaudhuri's passing in 1975, his wife Bina led CIF until December 2006. Today, CIF continues to offer a rich array of lectures, Sunday morning services, and cultural events. We celebrate holidays of many traditions including the birthdays of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Buddha. CIF celebrated its 62nd anniversary with a commemorative dinner in June 2013.

**Future Plans:** CIF teaches the complementarity of the world's great religions and philosophies and shelters the spiritual search of its members. CIF is also preserving archival materials of lectures and books by Dr. Chaudhuri and is exploring options for new publications. Seeking a new synthesis of past wisdom and future aspirations, CIF's highest goal is a world in peace and harmony.

**How you can participate:** Please come to our programs and become an active member! Your participation is much appreciated. Please visit our ashram and our website for more information.

**Contact:** CIF, 2650 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94118; Rita Chaudhuri Pease, President; 415-668-1559; [culturalfellowship@sbcglobal.net](mailto:culturalfellowship@sbcglobal.net); [www.culturalintegrationfellowship.org](http://www.culturalintegrationfellowship.org).

## SASP children's program

by Dakshina

For the past 18 years, once a month devotees from the Northern California region gather at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi for a day-long Collective Yoga retreat. Some months in advance, the participants

decide on which topics to take up as a focus of study, exploration and practice. As the retreats have evolved over the years, so too has the children's program which runs in parallel to the adult activities. In 2010, the addition of a yurt (30' diameter circular building) to the Ashram buildings has provided a beautiful space and place for the children's program to flourish. There are now anywhere from 6-12 children and youth that attend the retreats and they range from 3-14 years of age, with the older youth helping out with the younger. Taking up the same themes each month as the adult programs, the children explore the topics with creativity, fun and unexpected insights. The retreat group as a whole recently decided to focus their energies on a main karma yoga project of creating a new play area for the kids. With Ashram members, parents, children and devotees all pitching in, beautiful hand-built play structures are now getting a good use to the delight of these youngest members of the Collective Yoga retreat group in Lodi.





## *AV almanac*

### The missing dimension of sustainability

by Alan

*Reprinted from Auroville Today, January 2014*

Sustainability is a slippery term. Today it is used in so many different ways and contexts that it has lost its precision. In its simplest form, it says that if we are to sustain life in all its forms we need to live within the means of the planet. But how to achieve this?

The disagreements began at the first U.N. Conference on the Environment in 1972. The developed nations argued that the prime need was to protect the environment through the developing nations controlling their population. The developing nations retorted that the root problem was poverty—as Indira Gandhi put it, “Poverty is the worst form of pollution”—and poverty could only be eliminated through industrial development.

It’s a debate which still continues, in one form or another, today (see, for example, recent international disagreements over what should be done about climate change). But one of the immediate effects was division in the sustainability movement as the environmental and the social (or developmental) perspectives clashed over priorities.

In 1983 the UN set up the World Commission on Environment and Development (aka The Brundtland Commission). Its brief was to see if continued global economic development could be equated with protecting the environment, something which had been called into question by a seminal study called *Limits to Growth*. *Limits* warned that continued economic growth based upon the industrial model would lead to catastrophic environmental and, therefore, social collapse at some time in the 21st century.

Brundtland, however, declared that industrial growth and environmental protection could go hand-in-hand, as long as development was ‘sustainable’. And they defined sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Brundtland seemed to have squared the circle. However, many remained unconvinced. It was pointed out that as long as ‘needs’ were not defined, the definition was next to useless. And how was one to apply this definition in practice? Could one always predict how present developments would impact future generations?

In fact, dissatisfaction with the Brundtland definition led to many new attempts to define sustainability and sustainable

development, incorporating new parameters like economic and cultural sustainability. The result is a more integral concept but it has also led to much confusion and even doubts concerning the validity of the term ‘sustainability’.

#### **Auroville and sustainability**

Auroville has all the elements of a sustainable community. From an environmental perspective, it has worked successfully on land restoration; it has developed water recycling and sustainable building techniques; renewable energy systems are widely used; and the city is planned to be at least ‘green’. From a social sustainability perspective we can point to the fact that in Auroville today over 50 nationalities live together without discrimination based on caste, class, sex, religion or nationality. From an economic perspective, the fact that all immovable assets belong to the community; that Aurovilians offer their services to the community at a rate far below the market rate; and that there is an aspiration to eliminate cash transactions between Aurovilians and for the community to be self-supporting, are all indications that Auroville represents an alternative to the present unsustainable global economic order.

However, Auroville has very far to go before it can boast of being truly sustainable in environmental, social and economic terms. To take just a few examples, Auroville is far from being self-sufficient in food; our present transport pattern is dominated by individually-owned fossil-fuelled vehicles; Auroville still reflects the money-based value system of the larger world; the population and ethos is still not truly international; and the fact that it is expensive to live here determines, to a large extent, who can join the community.

So why haven’t we done better? We can point to factors like limited resources, to a poor communication culture and to the challenge of dealing with such a diversity of cultures and points of view. But the root cause seems to be something else.

#### **Towards a sustainable future course**

A group of Aurovilians discovered what this might be while running a course called ‘Towards a Sustainable Future’. The original idea was to promote sustainable change in India by inviting people to hear about and see Auroville’s environmental achievements. Participants would first be given a global overview of deforestation, energy, water and waste problems and then be taken out and shown Auroville’s forests, solar set-ups, natural water recycling systems etc.

The courses always proved popular with the participants, but when the organizers investigated how much change it was effecting in their lives, the answer was very little. The obvious reasons were that most of the participants came from cities and many of the Auroville experiments were not replicable there or were simply too expensive.

In fact, what participants tended to remember from their





Auroville workshop experience was inspiring encounters with Aurovilians as well as the particular energy of this place. But this was not enough to change the participants' perspectives once they returned to their cities and the habitual patterns of life reasserted themselves.

So what could change this? What were we missing in our workshop on sustainability?

Einstein put his finger on the problem when he wrote that, "You cannot solve a problem with the same mind-set which created it." And what is that mind-set? Among other things much of modern humanity assumes that the natural world exists for its benefit; that continued industrial development is the solution of poverty; and that happiness is the accumulation of more and more possessions. This cocktail is a recipe for global disaster.

But is Einstein correct in suggesting that we merely need to replace one mind-set with another more appropriate one? Sri Aurobindo disagrees, pointing out that the mind itself is the problem:

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way...Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity.

In other words, humanity is at present inherently unsustainable because it is relying upon the mind to solve the present global problems whereas the need is for a fundamental change of consciousness. As the cosmologist Brian Swimme puts it, "The need now is not simply to diminish the devastation of the planet but to alter the mode of consciousness that is responsible for such deadly activities".

## The key pillar

In this sense, 'spiritual sustainability' or 'consciousness evolution' can be seen to be not only the most neglected but also the key pillar of the sustainability movement. If we don't change our consciousness, the way we experience and live in this world, no amount of technological advances, recycling initiatives and fossil fuel replacement programmes will prevent us from destroying civilisation as we know it. In Auroville the same lesson applies. In sustainability terms, many of our failures can ultimately be seen to be failures to evolve the new consciousness which Sri Aurobindo and Mother speak of.

It is, of course, one thing to identify the problem, quite another to act upon it. In terms of the 'Towards a Sustainable Future' course, while we still show participants what we are doing here in landwork, alternative energy etc. we have shifted the emphasis from 'hard-edged' technologies to approaches which promote inner change. These include meditation and sessions on body awareness, developing energy consciousness and identifying ones unique spiritual task in the world.

The immediate response of the participants to these new courses has been enthusiastic. We have also seen that, as a result of this deeper work, they are far more likely to involve themselves in genuinely life-affirming activities when they return to their homes and workplaces. Some have even changed their work because it was no longer consonant with their new and deeper aspirations, and one group of past participants is purchasing land to set up a community on sustainable lines.

There is still much scope for improving the course. But at long last we feel we are on the right track. For consciousness development is the only truly sustainable path.

## Auroville education: opportunities and challenges

by Mandakini Gupta

*Reprinted from Auroville Today, January 2014, with modifications.*

According to Sanjeev, Director of Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Education and Research (SAIIR) there's a distinction between education and schooling. "Schooling is what happens in the schools during a certain period of one's life, while education, in the Mother's world, is unending, lifelong, not restricted to any predetermined syllabus," he says. He goes on to explain that while education includes schooling, sportive and extra-curricular activities, it also includes the influence of the environment and adults on the children.

Auroville is a safe, open environment where children can freely move around on their own. People interact with the children even if they don't know them. "I sometimes compare that to the joint family system in India," says Sanjeev. "The child is taken care of and influenced by a lot of people in a joint family which brings emotional stability and self-confidence. In Auroville, the joint family is replaced by the larger Auroville community and the smaller communities in which people live." The natural surroundings, the greenbelt, the Matrimandir, the gardens are all nurturing environments for a growing child. There are a lot of extra-curricular activities, such as music, dance, art, theatre, outdoor games, sports, horse-riding, forest walks, mountain-treks and cycling that take place in Auroville, and as almost every child is involved in some of these activities it makes for an integral education. This wide offering is not possible in a school situation; it can only happen in a community/Township setting.

However, Sanjeev points out that if parents learned the



Mandakini Gupta.



basics of child psychology and took some training in the nurturing of children it would enhance the positive experience at home. As to teachers, ideally Auroville's teachers ought to be in contact with their psychic being to feel a oneness with the children: according to the Mother, teachers should be yogis. Many Auroville teachers have this as their aim. "There are also many teachers who have learned on the job," says Sanjeev, "but who need to learn the theoretical underpinnings of their profession. To achieve this, a group of experienced teachers are going to start a teacher-training programme in Auroville."

Recently SAIER sponsored an integral education workshop with Partho, who is experienced in integral education. It was decided to ask him to work with different schools to align their programmes to The Mother's vision.

### School systems offered in Auroville

What are the education systems in Auroville? Until the 14 year-old age group, Auroville schools approach schooling using varying degrees of free-progress. The Learning Community (TLC), Deepanam and Transition schools all have their unique approaches towards schooling. Depending on the child's needs, the parents decide which school to pick. At the High School level schools in Auroville have broadly two streams. One is the free-progress education, offered in Last School, which doesn't lead to any certificate but where students are engaged to some extent in determining their own programmes. The other approach, offered by Future School, is the GCSE syllabus consisting of the 'O' and 'A' levels of the Cambridge system, in addition to non-examination subjects. Sanjeev says that whereas the Mother talked of no certificates, if we don't offer certificate courses like GCSE here, then many parents will place their children in outside schools and they will miss the Auroville experience. The GCSE qualification

is globally-recognised and enables students to be admitted to universities practically anywhere in the world.

### The student experience

Smiti, an ex-student of Last school, is currently apprenticing in dance, art installation, and backstage lighting design. Talking about her Auroville education experience, she says that all the schools she went to had free-progress. She studied many languages—English, French, Spanish, Sankrit, Tamil, Hindi, and even Japanese for a while—and literature and poetry in French and English. Her other subjects were Math, Biology, hands-on nature sciences, History, Geography, the Indian culture and current affairs. "The teachers were great," she says. Smiti is very involved in sports and extra-curricular activities and likes that Auroville provides immense opportunities to explore oneself. "The difficulty was that there was never enough time in the day and the week to cover everything I wanted to do," she says.

Ashwin, an ex-student of Future School, is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Information Technology Engineering at Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT), Vellore, South India. "The school gave us enough time to learn our desired subjects and we never experienced pressure or deadlines," says Ashwin. The teachers were good friends to us, in and outside school, so we could ask them anything. If there was a question about a subject, they made sure that everyone in class understood before moving ahead with the subject." Apart from a good student-teacher relationship, he says that each one of them had a mentor, one of the teachers, who would guide them in anything related to school or other matters.

Like Ashwin, Manjula passed out from Future School after which she graduated from Madras Christian College in Chennai. Upon her return to Auroville, she wanted to gain work experience. For a year she worked with Auroville Consulting as a project assistant and for the past four months she has been a teacher of Biology, Geography and Maths at Last School. In Future School she studied Biology, Geography, English, French, Math, History, English Literature and Cooking. She took her time in preparing herself and sat for the A level exam in three years instead of the usual two years.

To what extent were the students taught about the fundamental ideals of Auroville? Manjula says that for the first year the Auroville philosophy was a mandatory subject. They would discuss with their teacher the writings of Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and Auroville. However, in the second year it was an optional subject. The school also rec-

**School attendance figures in April 2013 (excluding AV Outreach Schools)**

Level	Name of AV School	Age Group	System	Children
Pre-Creche	Auroville Pre-Creche	1 - 2 yrs.	Free-Progress	52
Creche and Kindergarten	Aha! Kindergarten	3 to 6 yrs.	Free-Progress	108
	Auroville Kindergarten Nandanam Kindergarten			
Primary	Transition School Deepanam School The Learning Community	7 to 14 yrs.	Free-Progress with various approaches	219
Secondary	Future School	15 to 18 yrs.	GCSE + Free Progress Free-Progress	85
	Last School			
Total				464





commended that they enrol in extra-curricular activities and she chose Odissi dance, frisbee, women's football, Hindustani music, tennis, and badminton. "The whole day was packed," she says.

Very often the transition from Auroville secondary schools to colleges outside is challenging, as was in Ashwin's experience: "I struggled to cope up with the workload and deadlines." He says that at his university everything had a deadline. Each class consisted of more than 50 students and the student-teacher relationship was non-existent. He explains that the entire aim of education was to score well in the exams, whether one understood the subject or not. However, going out of Auroville was a good experience for him. "I learnt how to handle pressure, how to adapt and deal with sticky situations and learnt how the world outside functions."

As for Manjula, she felt the teacher-student relation was very formal in the college she went to "I missed that one-on-one connection which I treasured so much in Auroville schools," she says, "but I adapted very easily to the system there and found my own way."

## Challenges

At the primary and higher primary level, some Aurovilian parents choose to send their children to schools in Pondicherry since they issue certificates which are recognised outside. Many parents still do not subscribe to Mother's new way of thinking about education."

Education in Auroville is supposed to be free. Aurovilians and Newcomers are not expected to pay for their children's education, except for external examinations. However, the Auroville economy is not able to fully support the schools, and now schools are being forced to raise funds, sometimes asking parents to contribute a minimal amount.

## Higher education in Auroville

"The pressing question right now," says Sanjeev, "is what happens in terms of formal education after high school." It is evident that there is a high educational content in the activities that go on in Auroville. Interns/students come to Auroville from all over the world to study architecture, town planning, fashion design, sustainable living, land regeneration and organic farming. Now SAIIER is trying to turn this informal learning set-up into a formal post-secondary learning experience for Auroville students so that those who want to continue their education in Auroville have the possibility to do so. "What is holding this back is the lack of a team to take it up. But surely the people will show-up."

Freedom to explore one's being through umpteen extra-curricular activities, a mixed bag of cultures and nationalities and an atmosphere founded solidly on the ideal of human unity are some of the important aspects of Auroville education. What matters is that the students here continue to pass out as confident, self-dependent and conscious adults.

## Building bridges with art therapy

by Larry Seidlitz

*Reprinted from Auroville Today, January 2014.*

*Krupa discusses her work in Auroville with art therapy and bridging communities through art.*

When Krupa decided to settle in Auroville four years ago, it was not on a whim. Born in the United States to Gujarati parents, Krupa received an undergraduate degree in Graphic Design from Parsons New School of Design in New York and a master's degree in Art Therapy at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. After living 10 years in New York City, she wanted to return to her roots.

She travelled to more than 80 places throughout India and Nepal, visiting schools and NGOs to get a better idea of where art therapy could be applied. Auroville was one of her stops, where she stayed for 10 days in 2009. Upon returning to the US to think about her experiences, she realized that Auroville was a good place to start out as a volunteer. Six months later, she felt this was home.

"The arts are supported here, and already there was some semblance of art therapy happening. So it seemed like a really good place for me," she says. Besides, being in an international community was important to her. "I saw how much the children appreciated and benefited from participating in the art sessions, and I loved being able to give them the tools to express themselves."

Krupa's passion is to create a bridge between Auroville and the villages. Low self-esteem is a major issue for many village children here, she noted. Due to the pressure to perform, they often just try to please the teacher or their parents. Consequently, the sense of self is sometimes damaged.

In art therapy, any of the media can be used for creative expression, she explains. "Part of my responsibility is to have a wide range of media available as tools for self-expression, and then to find the right fit for the person." Depending on the situation, the creative art work can be supplemented with story-telling about the created object. If she is working with a young child, sometimes the work itself will tell the story.

"Art therapy also works better over time, whether individually or with a group, when they come back repeatedly at regular intervals. That helps to create a feeling of safety. The process or art therapy requires a lot of trust, especially here where there are often different cultures involved, and often not much openness to this kind of thing." Also, she finds a short guided meditation at the start of the session is helpful in opening up the children's imagination.

Krupa started out in Auroville working at Thamarai in the After School Programme. She was doing weekly sessions with teenagers and with some children between six and 10 years old. She learned a lot during that experience and started a basic crea-



tive literacy programme in which children would just experiment with using colours, for example.

From the Thamarai After School Programme, Krupa shifted to the Thamarai Healing Centre. Here the children were already learning about their bodies and the role of nutrition. Art therapy became an extension of this work. In 2011, they published a book called *Blooming Thamarai*, which is based on an affirmation doll project. "The project involved in-depth sessions with small groups that were coming regularly. I showed them how to make dolls, giving them the basic pattern, and then they each created one, and it became a character. Then they wrote stories about them, which for the book were translated into English."

Now Krupa is working at the Life Education Centre with a group of about 14 girls. "I wanted to find something that would work for all of them, so we started doing mandalas, creating images and symbols within a circle. Then I had them create journals, and inside the journals they expressed the symbols from the mandalas that were relevant for them. They then selected images from those mandala journals and painted them on the bridge outside the entrance to the centre."

The work helped to strengthen a sense of sanctuary, and it also cultivated a sense of legacy in that a part of them stays there. All art has some therapeutic aspect, she explains. Sometimes she sits individually with girls who need more attention and helps them work through their processes. She works with some adult women who come to the Centre as well.

Krupa sees art as something that can benefit the whole Auroville community. Recently she organized a community art event at the Visitors Centre and helped in winning a grant of US \$500 for art supplies, part of an international event held in 19 sites around the world on the same day. People were invited to sit down and make art for free. It was a huge success. "It was wonderful to see this mixture of more than 200 people from every culture sitting down at tables together and painting and drawing."

Krupa is now working to create her own space that would more intentionally be a bridge between Auroville and the villages. "I have a network of connections of art therapists working around the world, students and colleagues who are interested in

how it is being used in this context. I am continuing to support the projects I have been part of, but I would like to do this work in a more focused way."

Her mission is to provide the tools and resources that are needed to express oneself, show how to use them, and to facilitate awareness, insight, and empowerment through that process. Another aspect of her mission is exchange with others through the art. She explains, "Recently I have been working with students from Turkey, Delhi, and Edaiyanchavadi in one room doing art together. In the future I would like to have students from an Auroville school and students from a village school doing art activities together. In addition, the centre could be a place for professional exchanges between art therapists working in different contexts or settings."

The next step is fundraising, she says. She has already lined up a friend who is going to help with that and a network she has built up over the last four years, sharing the work that she is doing. "I am confident that this will come together."

For more information, visit <http://www.sankalpajourneys.com>

### Using art therapy for trauma healing

While working at the After School Programme, Krupa also got involved with the Child Protection Services, and was the coordinator for the group during her Newcomer period. The group was composed of five Aurovilians and a visiting specialist from Canada who has been in child protection for 35 years. Last year they organized a series of six workshops in Vérité so teachers and parents could learn more about the topic.

"We work on these issues with affected family members and just guide them through the process," says Krupa. "Some individuals in Auroville have bravely sought help for physically and emotionally abusive situations in their homes, recognizing the need for assistance."

Another aspect of this work is educational outreach. Two members of the group are teachers who go into the schools to talk about very basic topics, such as how to say no if someone is trying to touch you, and even about anatomy. Their sensitive approach to such a difficult topic, which allows the children to ask questions, has been effective.

She is doing both one on one sessions with children as well as family sessions, applying art therapy for a mix of situations which the children are dealing with. "This gets really sensitive," she explains, "especially in a multicultural context, and there has been a lot of tension and resistance about these topics. Art therapy can be useful in these situations, because instead of having to verbally explain whatever trauma or emotion or difficulties might be there, the art offers a tool where these issues can be expressed in another way. It provides something concrete that helps the person to ground whatever emotions or issues that are coming up, and then those symbols can change as the process unfolds."



## Chronicles

### Amidhar's story

*The extraordinary, unpublished story of Amidhar, from the author's "How they came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother" series*

by Shyam Kumari

Sometimes the best type of fruits and flowers are obtained, not by their seeds, but by grafting them onto another plant in a different soil. In the same way for a spiritual flowering, the Divine cut me abruptly from my parental house.

I must have had an inborn witness consciousness and faculty to go out of my body for I can still visualize that dusky, fateful morning when my sobbing Mother, followed by my maternal uncle, left the portals of our ancestral home. My father's eyes were ablaze with anger against my uncle who was rescuing her from threats of murder by my father, if his continuous and long drawn out dowry demands were not met. My mother left with only the clothes on her body and carried a two and a half year old sleeping child (myself) wrapped in a yellowed shawl, to the Padra Railway Station.

Thereafter the scenes in my life-story changed rapidly. In a few years this loving maternal uncle died. Then my mother and I were left to shift from one maternal uncle's house to another's where my mother attended to the household affairs during their wives' numerous pregnancies. In those days of epidemics and a high rate of infant and child mortality, women bore many children because only one or two were expected to reach adulthood. I myself am the 10th and the last child of my rich doctor father. Yet, of all these children including four by his first wife, (who also had to leave his house, due to dowry harassment, with all her children dead) only two, myself and my elder brother, passed the threshold of twenty.

I narrate a few incidents of my early



*Shyam Kumari working at her computer.*

life which helped my spiritual growth. My mother used to carry me to a temple to listen to the devotional songs sung by a Bengali Sannyasi, Pagal Parmanand, who had renounced the world at the age of 16. An adept of vocal classical music, daily he sang devotional songs in the temple. He could play many instruments with consummate mastery. It is certain that he was a realised soul. While he sang, I slept in my mother's lap. During sleep my subtle being would come out of my body and roam about. Sannyasi Parmanand was my first guide and planted in me the seeds of yogic practices like, *Pranayam, Hathayoga, Japa, Tratak, Meditation, Kundalini Yoga*, etc., which I later pursued.

At the age of six a poisonous snake bit me but a witch doctor cured me. This cure gave my body such an immunity from poison that in later years, on six different occasions, when I was bit by scorpions they got paralysed and died while I felt only a mild sting like a thorn-prick.

This same year my 16 year old elder sister died at my father's place, in tragic circumstances. In spite of her death-bed entreaties, my mother was not allowed to see her. Due to this blow, my mother was deeply depressed and became almost insane with grief. Two things saved her from this tragic fate, one was the study of the *Yoga Vashistha* and the second was the kindness and company of a great lady.

This lady entered our lives like an angel of mercy. She became an oasis in the bleak desert of our days and gave enough

support to my mother to save her from insanity. She also lit the lamp of devotion and love for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in my six year old heart.

My mother was older than this lady and there was a great social gulf between a poor woman living on the charity of unwilling relatives and the daughter-in-law of the richest and most influential family of the town. But half a century back, the barriers between the rich and the poor were not so great as today. Apart from this, my mother and this lady had a very firm meeting ground in their devotion to Lord Shiva, who was the presiding deity in the lives of both these devout women. Both of them practised Japa and Pranayam and fasted frequently. The husband of this lady went abroad for higher studies. The society of this town was very orthodox and it would have been unseemly for the lady to live alone at night, in the absence of her husband. Though she was an emancipated woman, she accepted the customs of the society. That is how, during the period her husband was in England, at night, I came to sleep at her place as a six-year old social watchman and companion.

Here, in this auspicious place, at that tender age, I came to know Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In this lady's Pooja room there was a wooden low table, on which were installed the photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Incense and flowers were offered in front of the photographs. Each night I prepared a bed for myself in one corner of this room and was free to sit or sleep, while the lady would pray, sing devotional songs and hymns, and perform rites with flowers and incense in front of the photographs. After this she would enter into deep meditation for many hours. I don't know how long she remained in that state because I always fell asleep after watching her for some time.

This ritual routine was frequently broken by our visits to a Shiva Temple situated in the cremation ground outside our town. It was a dreaded place and it was rumoured that thieves and free-booters had their hiding places in the thickets around. But the lady was not at all afraid. She used to lock the doors of the temple from





inside. I went to sleep in the grilled verandah while she spent the night in meditation sitting in the lotus pose. At dawn she would wake me up to return home.

During the day I stayed at my maternal uncle's place but was often called by the lady for small services, the important one being the frequent posting of her letters to the Divine Mother. The memory lingers of those special rose-violet envelopes of a special size, imported from France, which the Mother herself had given to this lady.

It was out of kindness and charity that this lady had undertaken to bring my mother out of her depression. This lady strengthened my mother's faith in Shiva and Parvati, whose embodiments she had seen and realised in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This made my mother eager to come for Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Darshan but she could not afford the 12 Rupees needed for the railway fare. Decades passed before I could bring her to the sacred land of Pondicherry for the 15 August 1950 Darshan.

Three years passed. The lady's husband returned and they decided to settle abroad. Before leaving lady called me and said, "I am going. How can I reward you? What should I give you?" I pointed to the wooden board, upon which two photographs of Sri Aurobindo and five of the Mother had been pasted. The paper upon which the photographs were pasted was ordinary and the frame crude, yet it was all I wanted because I had fallen in love with them. Therefore without hesitation I said, "If you want to give something then give me this combination of the photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother." She graciously said, "With these photographs directly given by the Lord I am giving you a part of my life. I give them on the condition that you maintain them with love and care." I gave her my word and promised to hold them dearer than life and have faithfully kept the promise. At times I had had to open the frame for cleaning, otherwise I have kept the same glass and the same frame for more than half a century knowing that these things were touched by the Lord and have always carried it with me.

With the lady's departure, the part that this town had to play in my life also

closed. My mother had to move in with other maternal uncles living in different villages and henceforth we lived the life of orphaned dependents.

We went to Ahmedabad to live with one of my uncles. The one year spent there was memorable in one way. My uncle's family used to recite the Gita and *Hanuman Chalisa* every evening. I along with my mother learnt several chapters of these two sacred texts by heart. But within a year my loving uncle died and again we were on the road, shuttled from uncle to uncle, village to village. We went wheresoever my mother's services were required. I picked up my education in bits and pieces, at various places. In those times lack of constant attendance in school did not bar a candidate from an examination. In one of these places I made a deep study of Sanskrit and English which my brother-in-law taught me.

Here I read a Gujarati book *Ishwarno Inkar* (Denial of God) written by Narasinghbhai Patel. I was deeply impressed by the book and discussed it with my brother-in-law for hours. Due to its impact I became an atheist. This was partly due to my immaturity and partly due to the influence of my brother-in-law. This stage lasted for two years.

At the age of 12 I had to return to a village where one of my uncles lived. That same year I visited my brother, who was studying in a college. Somehow I sensed that his health was not good and he was suffering from T.B. Much alarmed by my suspicion my brother informed my father, who had my brother examined and my suspicion was confirmed.

Father did not allow my mother to see my brother, but he allowed me, a lad of 13, to remain in my brother's private room at the hospital, even though he was in the second stage of T.B., which was considered highly contagious in those days. My brother had to take complete rest and was allowed only light reading. One of these books was *Yogini Kumari*. This mystic occult book made a profound impact upon me. My atheism evaporated. The book got me interested in *Rasa Siddhi Shastra* and opened before me vistas of the power of

concentration, action of will and possible access to supra-physical worlds. This also attracted me to the science of alchemy. I read several books on this subject, as well as books which described the science of communicating with supraphysical planes. Two Buddhist texts led me to the study of concentration.

When I was 14 somebody presented me with a copy of the *Patanjali Yoga Sutra*. The study of this classic led me to the study of pranayam and meditation and a study of Vivekananda's *Rajayoga* led to an in-depth exploration of these subjects. I started to practice Rajayoga. This practice was accelerated by the study of two books, the *Hathayoga Pradipika* and the *Gherand Sanhita*. From these books I learnt the processes of *Asanas*, *Mudras*, *Ajapa Jap* and *Sad Chakra Bheda* by doing Kundalini yoga. In some other books I found greater details about these subjects.

From the age of 12 to 17 I was forced to travel from one place to another. Even though I was enrolled at Kaira High School, I was frequently absent due to the necessity of visiting different towns where my relatives lived. During this period many yogic influences entered my life and I attained many siddhis.

I became friendly with a rich, straightforward widower of about 70. This man tried to serve various sannyasis. Through him I came to know Paramhansa Atmananda, who practised Tantra of the Shakta School and was a great realised soul. He lived alone in a house situated outside the village and did intense sadhana. He did not see anyone for 20 hours out of 24. Only in the evening he met a few people and answered their questions. It was said that the Goddess Tripura Sundari had descended into his body which accounted for his pink white complexion and unearthly beauty. At the time I came to know him he was trying for *Mahakali Siddhi*, and I believe he attained it some time later.

Atmananda's guru had given him the *Swarna Siddhi*—the power to turn an ordinary pebble into gold, without resorting to alchemic processes, so that he would not have to depend upon others for his



needs. But there was this restriction that he should not make more than 1 tola (1 tola is a little more than 12 grams) of gold at one time and should use it only for his simple needs.

I was fascinated by him and even though at times he scolded me severely, I remained with him for several years. Due to our poverty I begged him to grant me the *Swarna Siddhi*. After some thought he consented to impart this power to me and called me at 10 a.m. on the day preceding the full moon night of the month of Kartik. I went to him on the appointed day with great expectations. But after examining my palm and my aura he told me that *Swarna Siddhi* of his type was not for me. But *Saraswati Siddhi* by which Goddess Saraswati descends on the tongue, will be within my reach. He gave me the initiation and mantras of this *siddhi*.

Once a lunar eclipse was to take place on a full moon night. I sat outside his quarters with some friends. We had come to a particular place to participate in a ritual of which I was one of the priests. Suddenly Atmananda came out of his quarters and commanded me, "Boy, follow me." I at once obeyed him and hurried behind him carrying his clothes and some other things. We walked towards the crocodile infested river in whose swirling waters that very morning I had seen floating the corpse of a drowned man. Yet his command was so powerful that in spite of my fears my mind and body obeyed.

It was totally dark due to the lunar eclipse. But the saint never looked back. He walked on reciting mantras from the scriptures. This recitation was hypnotic. Soon we reached the river bank. Without any hesitation Atmananda stepped upon the dark waters and began walking towards a small islet in the middle of the river, about 50 meters from the shore. But I lost courage and did not dare to step upon the 70 feet deep waters. Paralysed and hypnotized I sat upon the bank while Atmananda continued his mantra-recitation and worship for about 6 hours.

The eclipse gradually advanced and receded. I must have dozed because at about 5 a.m. I found Atmananda standing

before me. He asked for his clothes which I handed over. Without one word, continuing his recitation, he briskly walked back to his quarters and shut the door. I was left standing outside.

In the morning Atmananda summoned me and asked why I didn't follow him? I babbled that he did not command me specifically to do so and that I was afraid. Much later did the sage tell me, "Look here what was to happen has happened. Even though you were not fated for *Swarna Siddhi*, I attempted to give it to you on the night of the eclipse but God's Law and Will are inscrutable. I could not do so because you did not follow me. Though it is unusual for you not to obey me. Now take heart. I have given you the invocation mantra of Saraswati which is greater than the *Swarna Siddhi* and in the years to come you will be helped by it in acquiring many *siddhis* on your own by my blessings. And then who knows? If this body persists we will meet after 10 years and then I will give you *Swarna Siddhi*. Take heart because God is your guide."

On an earlier occasion I had come to know that Atmananda had taught somebody the ritual for getting wealth, short of the *Swarna Siddhi*. I was naturally interested. When he came to know about my interest, Atmananda had admonished me, "My boy! such paltry things are for ordinary people. It is beyond the Law of your soul to stoop to such low things. Do not try to venture into such trivial things."

I had started the *sadhana* of Patanjali Yoga. I would sit in front of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's photographs and concentrating between the eyebrows I would do *Tratak*. I also practised *Ajapa Jap* and the *Shakti Chalini Mudra* followed. One day I felt my Kundalini awakening. Atmananda ordered me, "Leave it alone. The Kundalini Path is not for you. You have learnt the methods and practice. Leave it halfway. You can teach it to others but it is not your destiny to complete it." It is significant that I did all these various *sadhanas* in front of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's photographs.

I pleaded with Atmananda to take me as a disciple but he declined. He told me that

neither *sannyasa* nor married life were for me and that I would have to seek my own way. Two days after this conversation he left the village for an undisclosed destination. I was not even allowed to see him off.

Five years after leaving our village Atmananda left his body. The great Saraswati Initiation that he gave me is still with me. It has worked wonders constantly and has ultimately led me to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Atmananda had assured me, "God will look after you." His words have come true. Even though Atmananda left his body long ago, by a little concentration I can come in contact with him.

In following years I followed dozens of *sadhanas* with different guides. Once inspired by a book *Yogic Sadhan* by Sri Aurobindo, I started the *sadhana* of *Trikal Drsti* which brings the knowledge of past, present and future. This boon I got by the combined practice of Aghor *Sadhana* and a Buddhist discipline called *Anapan Satti*. By *Aghor Sadhana* I got the *Aghor Shakti*. By using it one can kill and cure anybody. I used these *siddhis* for the welfare of my friends but soon discovered that in the final analysis it truly did not help them. Actually these beneficiaries harmed me therefore I gave up its use. But once when my brother became mortally ill, a friend asked me to use my power to cure his disease by the use of *Aghor Siddhi*. I had never done so before. We both did the *sadhana* and suddenly all traces of illness left my brother. He lived for 50 more years. But later my brother and friend did as much harm to me as possible. Then I realised that the violation of Nature's Laws out of ego or desire always ends in nature avenging the violator. Once, out of fun I used *Trikal Drsti* to help a friend select a wife. The selection was proper but against the will of his relatives and his destiny. For no reason whatever the fellow lapsed into insanity. Now I have surrendered *Trikal Drsti* to the Mother Nature because I should not use it without becoming totally free of ego, preferences and desires.

Now another experience came to me—quietude of the mind. One day while I was walking just behind the band in a marriage procession, there was a descent



of a palpable silence. All around me there was a terrific din of drum beats and of the band blaring with full force, to say nothing of a hundred voiced human babble even then suddenly I felt a ring of quietude around me. No sound reached me. I felt as if numerous subtle, fibre like arrows of light shot out from my heart and flung far away all those noises. Though, at first, I had this experience of quietude only in noisy places, later I could get it anywhere and my mind would become quiet.

During the practice of *Shravan Manan* and *Nidhyasan* of the *Yoga Vashishta*, I read a sentence about the *Chidakasha* aspect of the Parabrahman. In the *Yoga Vashishta*, Mahasaraswati told the grieving queen Lilawati, "In the *Chidakasha* there are no limits of Time and Space. So there can be several worlds and lives in one and the same place." When I read this sentence, something happened to me—I had the great experience of *Sad*

*Brahman*. I felt as if the whole material curtain of the universe was parted and saw all things as unrealities floating in the infinity of the Parabrahman. At the same time I felt a universality—as if I was an existence pervading all the universe, and that the world was a Maya, a Falsehood. The body was felt only as a reference point for the ego. It was a queer feeling to see and experience the manifestation as a floating unreality or an image on an immense background of the extended Infinite Self. For more than a fortnight the experience continued uninterrupted, even while I attended to my work. Then gradually it was veiled. Some years later Sri Aurobindo said it was, "... an experience of *Sad Brahman* on the mental plane." During these 15 days my body continued its functioning automatically. It felt hunger and sleep and pain. It took a bath, went walking and attended school, etc.

Now a powerful query arose in my mind. I asked myself, "If all this manifest existence is Maya, then who is that who feels hunger and thirst? Who has the sense of pain and pleasure?" I had delved deeply

in the Vedanta and the Buddhist philosophies as well as in Tantric and mystic lore. During these explorations I discovered that by whatever method one approaches the 'existence', it ultimately boils down to life, old-age and death. Nowhere did I find either the relation between the Witness and the Creation or the solution of the problems of the body and the dreadful universe with its Karmic Laws. Everything has to end.

By the time I was 16, by intense sadhana I had had many realisations, some of them hinted above. The study and practice of the various traditional paths of sadhana had also showed me that life as it was, did not begin and end with physical birth and death but was only a series of events on which 'I' was imposed. Nothing was permanent. Only goal was to realise the Brah-

*Then, when I was 17 or 18, The Life Divine entered my life. It exploded all previous concepts.*

man, to experience the identity of the soul with Brahman. The body was an impediment but it could be cast away by Patanjali methods after establishing identity with the Universal Being who existed beyond life and birth of a single life. But to me it seemed a dead end. If all the manifestation was an illusion and one had to get out of it as many Yogis had done, then why had the Brahman created it? What place did one's self had in this immensity of the Infinite, *Udasina* and *Nirlep Brahman* which exceeded even the Sachchidananda and Maha Sunya? Nothing was conclusive.

In any case I could not even enter the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and leave my body till my mother was alive because I had to look after her. Yet an ordinary life of marriage and sex was obviously out of question for me. It was a stalemate.

While awaiting an answer to these problems and experimenting with different sadhanas, I stumbled upon Sri Aurobindo's *Bases of Yoga*. It indicated to me that Mind and Life were only fragments of some Universal Mind and Universal Life which had a consistent existence and gave

inherent permanence to the individual's Life but that was all.

Then, when I was 17 or 18 *The Life Divine* entered my life. It exploded all previous concepts. It said that the Supreme, through various gradations, was continuously involved and working in and through the individual and if Sri Aurobindo was right, it was only the Supreme Supermind which could solve the problems of Life and could resolve the riddles of all the systems of sadhana. But then were the great ancient yogis like Janak, Jyaneshwar, Chudala, and Jada Bharat etc. misguided? Were the practices they followed incorrect? Was the famous pronouncement of the Upanishad that after the realisation of the Brahman the body is to be shed, universe to be left, incorrect? Was the Ritambhara Pragnya propounded by Patanjali, inferior

to the Supermind? And were the Supermind's upper and lower gradations descending through the mind, life and

body, in any way superior? Were the old Vedic Rishis and Buddha and Adi Shankaracharya wrong? And were the Tantric and Yogic practices of samadhi only utilitarian and had been used by the Time Spirit only as stepping-stones to what Sri Aurobindo called his Integral Yoga? Were the realisations of Raman Maharishi, Ramdas, Narayan Swami, etc. incomplete?

Something was wrong somewhere. There was the heavy weight of the past Shastras and sadhanas against what Sri Aurobindo propounded. And it was on these grounds and against the background of personal experiences that I wrote to Sri Aurobindo challenging him to prove himself not in the verbal theory of *The Life Divine* but by showing in experience his Supermind as a realised fact, which he himself had not been able to do, to all appearances. And it was on this point that Sri Aurobindo invited me to visit the Ashram and to find for myself whether I, with my Shastras and great practices and experiences was right or whether his unrealised but realisable Supramental Transformation was the ultimate solution.





## Two special darshans of the Mother

by Narad Eggenberger

*This is the account of two unique darshans that Mother gave to me (and others), experiences that will live for ever in my soul.*

### The Ashram choir

In 1961 I made my first journey to the Ashram. Jyotipriya had written Mother sending Her my photograph and a sample of my handwriting. Mother replied: "He may come and stay as long as he likes." I arrived on November 23, the evening before Darshan. In the weeks to come I had my first interview with Mother and She arranged for me to teach music in the Ashram school. Since my love for music had been strongly influenced by the choral tradition, I soon began a choir.

There were many good singers among the young men and women who joined, yet even more important, an enthusiastic willingness to rehearse and a joy in singing that infused each work we sang. Having sufficient sheet music for a cappella choir, primarily from the religious repertoire, we soon built a program of choral music from many centuries.

Everyone had an aspiration to learn the scores and to blend their voices, individually and by section, one of the great challenges to all choirs. After numerous rehearsals I can say that the choir had developed into a finely honed ensemble. Most of the singers were in their late teens and early to mid twenties and we all expressed an aspiration to sing for Mother. I wrote Mother of our wish to sing for Her but received no reply.

During this time I was seeing Marilyn Widman regularly and she, in her role as an elder sister, encouraged me to write Mother again. I did so and once more there was no reply. I felt that Mother was too involved in Her work to be able to devote the time to listen to our choir. Being a callow youth I was deeply influenced by Marilyn who insisted that I write Mother

again since She may not have received my letter or was too busy to answer. Marilyn instructed me to write Mother that we would sing for Her under Her balcony on a fixed date and hour. This time Mother replied, fixing the date and time, and saying that it would be better if we would stand by the Samadhi. She would come down the stairs and sit by the window overlooking the Samadhi.

Although at times I have been deeply pained that I troubled Mother and disturbed Her work, I also realize what an extraordinary blessing She gave us. We were all shocked when we entered the ashram courtyard and found that it was almost completely filled with disciples, for little did we realize how quickly the word had spread that there would be a special darshan.

A place was made for the choir on the east side of the Samadhi looking up towards the window where Mother was seated. Suddenly, all was silent and it was time to begin our choral offering. The choir was facing Mother and since I was conducting I faced the Samadhi. All was silent as I gave the tones to the various voice parts. I brought my hands up, gave the downbeat and the most awful cacophony resounded through the Ashram courtyard!

The first piece was a total disaster! It was so completely out of tune it was painful. I realized then that we had a serious problem. We had not previously rehearsed out-of-doors and the wind was playing havoc preventing the different sections from hearing each other! And there were still six or more works to sing.

At this point I turned around and lifting my eyes to the window where Mother sat, I prayed simply: "Mother, we are singing for You, please help us." The remainder of the concert was perfect, not a missed note, everyone in perfect harmony, a blend of voices that would make the angels proud. As we concluded, we all looked to Mother in gratitude and today, nearly forty years later, I can remember the joy amongst all of us for this very special Darshan.

As everyone began to leave the courtyard I met Dimitri who told me that after our out-of-tune rendition of the first piece

on the program, each composition thereafter was indeed perfectly sung.

### In the Service Tree

When Mother gave me the work of caring for the Service Tree immediately after the cyclone broke the massive branch that was directly over the Samadhi, facing south, I began a program of pruning and fertilizing the tree throughout the 1970's to 1981. During the 1980's I lived in the U.S. and in the 1990's once again took up the work, now with many able assistants, among them Montu and Andreas.

This is the story of a day in 1970 (or 1971, I no longer recall exactly) when I was still climbing without a safety harness, often going very high into the top of the tree to prune branches. This particular day I had much to do as there were numerous dead branches to be pruned, diseased areas to clean out, jagged edges to be smoothed, etc. Climbing throughout the tree, section by section, I came finally to the eastern side and, turning a bit north, I saw Mother in Her room! Perhaps I should not have glanced at Her golden form in that vast space where I felt no walls, but can the bumble bee not incline towards the honey-eyed flower? Though I could have fallen from the tree, so powerful was the experience, who kept my feet in place and my balance intact? How could one not have looked at She who is "The magnet of our difficult ascent"?

Today, more than 30 years later, I remember that moment high up in our beloved Service Tree, and Mother's darshan. Now, things are different and many of our sages and seers have commented on how long it will take for the supramental race to be established on earth. I know very little, nothing really, but I do know that She resides in us and we in Her, now and for all ages. In one of the last meetings with Nolinida here is what he said: "Your body (pointing to Mary Helen) and your body (pointing to me) and my body may all look different but they are not, they are all the same...they are all Her body, really. She has put a part of Herself into each of us."



## Essays

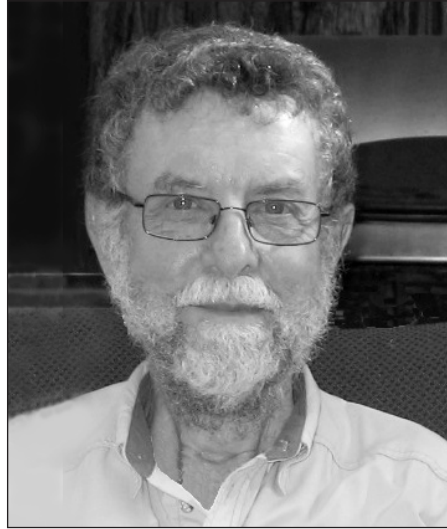
### Land and spirit An American yoga for the 21st Century

by John Robert Cornell

#### Prologue

**T**he last hundred years have hurled wave after wave of change against the beaches and cliffs of humanity. The attacks on September 11, 2001, didn't "change everything." Change was rampaging through the old ways long before 9/11. The industrial revolution matured, divorcing family members from one another and from the land. The nuclear family huddles dazed in the trenches, a fragment of the extended family of our ancestors. Millions flocked from the farmlands of their forefathers' livelihood and memories to centers of commerce. Cities devoured the countryside. Air travel and space travel and electronic communications compressed time and space into a single quivering brew. Vast waves of immigration churned the ethnic mix of every continent. World Wars seized the globe and genocides of many sizes raged. All the remaining ethnic enclaves hidden by distance or remoteness from the Reason-powered eye of Western civilization were exposed, ripped open, often destroyed. Great corporations formed, grabbed for themselves the legal status of persons, and then used wealth and muscle to overrun government and society, commerce and agriculture. Science, reason's full-blooded son, gave us miracle drugs; a tunnel to the atom and the awesome power hidden there; a vision of one earth from the moon; a whole new evolutionary cosmology relating galaxies, stars, and life; machine servants; deadly, remote-control warfare, and a terrifyingly blind ability to topple the foundations of life on the whole planet.

Religion, education, government, commerce, food production, social my-



John Robert Cornell.

thology, social hierarchy, gender, race relations, and nature itself have all been sucked into the maelstrom of change and whirled around in its soup. A thousand answers to the question of our time—What the heck is going on—have shot through the air of expectation and exploded on the rocks of confusion.

Into this dragon dance and roar of change, a reasoned and beyond-reason attentiveness to the land has resurfaced in America. The attentiveness is not new. The first Americans studied the land to survive and celebrate their kinship with it. The land spoke to them and taught them, but their "land" was something other than the inanimate, mechanical, chemical and mineral resource that we mean by land today. They had different eyes that recognized a numinous Presence in other living creatures, but also in stone and waterfall and mountain peak. After the European immigrants had been here for a while, a few of them too begin to see and hear the living land. A new wave of listeners and voices devoted to the land sang for us—Thoreau, Emerson, Dickinson, Whitman, Muir—of another way, a different life and sight. Something in the land itself, they seemed to say, can teach us, can answer the question that all-conquering reason cannot: What the heck is going on?

But most Americans weren't listening. We were instead rushing into cities and commerce and wealth and war.

Until the sixties. Something happened then. Abruptly, a generation of new adults began asking hard questions: What the heck IS going on? Where are we going? What is this all about? Why do we want to keep hurtling ahead into more and more bloody Vietnams and stifling corporate systems, that give us... what? More stuff? More excitement... to be used for... what? To stay excited...? for what? "Oh, Jane, I'm excited about this new plevmrtem." "Jack, did you hear about the latest buzmoft? I can't wait to get my hands on one."

The deepest questioning receded from public awareness for a while, but it fed a quiet flowering of "nature writing" that was growing up all around us. Another wave of listeners began to attend to the living land. The messages and the questions were getting more urgent. Millions of people looked back to the countryside, some returning to the land, others seeking out the wild and solitary landscape as a temporary escape from city chaos or a place to look for THE answer when religion, politics, education, activism, money, excitement failed to provide it.

Here, there, outcroppings of the numinous shine like crystals in reports coming back from this new wave of listeners and voices of the land. But no one quite knows what to do with this jeweled experience and insight. There is something precious here, something to be sought. But what is it, and can it tell us what this wild ride of civilization is about, what peak of chaos or transition this rushing tide of change portends?

For Americans, the land is a key, a base. It is a bedrock source of life and meaning and un-stultification. Without that attention to the land, we spiral off accumulating an idiotic mountain of stuff, indulge in brainless rushing around, or retreat into squinty-eyed suspicion.

For the individual with eyes and ears attuned to it, the wild land speaks a message of widening, deepening, reconnecting, universalizing.

Does it really speak? Yes, really, though not so often in human language blinkered by smallness, constriction, blind "practicality."



More and more we have begun to notice that the messages are for us, not for someone else—the Indians, the odd hippie, the old ones, the past, the “mystics.” For us, walking out there in our hiking or hunting boots, our fishing waders, our sneakers in the garden, our vacation in the park or at the lake. Yes, maybe we don’t always notice the gold or the gleam. But these new listeners, they do slow down and notice. They have come to do that. They remind us to notice. To listen, to observe. To become native to this land. To take it on, listening and watching instead of ripping and consuming and deadening.

To listen.

To watch.

There is something to join here, because there is a listening going on in the land already. A watching, too. If you slow down enough, you too will notice it. And it is not just “your” watching, any more than it is just this child’s or that bluejay’s watching. It is a watching, or the watching, not confined to any one species or even to the totality of species. It is pure watching, inclusive, the essence of watching, seeing’s own self, that we join when we shift our awareness there. It is inherent in the land. The old Indians said that the land is alive and it knows you are there. It is alive. We would say it is conscious. There is a consciousness there. That one can participate in, concretely.

This is not metaphor.

We may not notice, because this watching is not specifically mental, and our mental noise drowns out everything else. But when it takes us up, we notice that we are not specifically and totally mental either.

Once again, we are not exactly what we thought we were—this mechanical clutching “I” with the universe revolving around us, this brilliant brain, this puddle of feelings. We are instead—or also—a point in this other, larger something. And, we are also this other something.

This watching, this pool of self-conscious light is also us, but not the old narrow, limited, recent us. It is the Future Us breaking into the present, pushing the present into the future, evolving it, a wider



Illustration by Karen Cornell.

you, the evolutionary truth of me.

This pool has the essential quality of self awareness, but it is not limited to my self or your body or his old single point of view behind his eyes. It doesn’t seem to have a point of view. It gathers many points of view without dissolving into them. It is one and many together, without collapse or fragmentation. It is both and yet one.

And whose awareness is it?

Perhaps it doesn’t declare itself, blab its identity to our casual question just immediately. Maybe it is more like an Indian. It watches. It waits. For respect, for humility, for a little ego deflation, a little less ME-as-the-center-of-the-world-ness by default. For the possibility of synchronizing, of meshing at the same frequency. Perhaps it is teaching that. Teaching a new meshing, of respect, of humility without spin. Yes, it is like the old ways, but honed, enriched by the development, the stretching of the past, the churning of the present, the wisdom of the whole world that can be brought to bear now into this attention.

And here, it has an American flavor.

## 1. Song of the land

*The inner ear that listens to solitude,  
Leaning self-rapt unboundedly could hear  
The rhythm of the intenser wordless*

*Thought*

*That gathers in the silence behind life,...<sup>1</sup>*

## Experience of Grace

There was something special in Pondicherry.

Something very quiet. Something intimate.

It seeped into my awareness soon after we arrived. We stepped into it when we reached the quarter of Pondicherry that contains the scattered buildings of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Walking the streets of the town, we began to sense its outlines. We felt it thinning when we left the Ashram quarter and crossed into the commercial district of Pondicherry. The closer we got to the main Ashram building, the more substantial it grew, a tangible envelope of sweetness.

Our days inside this envelope flew by.

While they lasted, I tried to freeze the moments, make them stop their bull-headed rush to the airport. We’re still here! We’re still in India, I kept telling myself. I wanted to savor every flower scent, every dark face, every breeze and step there.

My wife and I had just spent two weeks in the Ashram quarter of this coastal city in south India. I felt that I had finally come home.

But then the last day broke in and stretched out into 52 hours of sardine airline seats and plastic airports. Too soon we landed hard back in Northern California.

At our other home.

In a couple of days I had to go back to my regular job.

Sitting on the living room couch on a cold January morning, I thought that the adventure of light was over.

The adventure consisted of two weeks in almost continual grace. In the courtyard of the main Ashram building, grace is a massive and sustaining silence.

When I first walked into that courtyard, the silence blanketed the ordinary





racket in my head and heart without any effort on my part. It felt like walking into a cloud of down. It soothed every raw edge, rounded every sharp corner; every thin, shriveled flake of my being was moisturized by some invisible settling dew.

And it was such a relief.

To a casual visitor, the envelope of grace would be puzzling unless you knew that a tremendous work has been going on here continuously for nearly a century.

Even then it is hard to define, but you know something is different. It's as if something is being born here. Perhaps something of the future.

Of the force behind this work, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

A Bliss, a Light, a Power, a flame-  
white Love  
Caught all into a sole immense embrace...<sup>2</sup>

Some immensely benevolent Power seemed to be holding us in a quiet embrace. The breeze, the pavement stones, whitewashed apartments, bananas and dahl in the dining room, the eyes of a beggar without legs, the luminous brown eyes of the residents... everything there radiated an invisible, ethereal cream. The air rested a great calm hand on our shoulder. The pavement and the adobe buildings gave off... not exactly a fragrance. It was nothing newsworthy, nothing sensational.

It was quiet.

Not that Pondicherry was physically quiet in any way! Honking, smelly auto-rickshaws and motorcycles without mufflers; skinny dogs tangling on dirty side streets at midnight; black water buffalo clomping on cobblestones; clanking construction machinery; even rock music blaring from a seaside cafe in the evening...

Early morning was a din. And the traffic... To a first-time visitor, the streets seem an impassable, tangled torrent of flesh, rubber, steel and smog.

Yet behind all that, within it, was an unmistakable, supporting, calm something. Unmistakable, like the support that your physical body has floating in a quiet river or your dream body has in the

air during a flying dream. A support that doesn't make anything of itself, doesn't call attention to itself. It just does its work. A combination of a quiet invisible support... and something else.

You could call it love, or grace, but very wide and embracing. It was not excited, nothing in the least stirred up.

It was calm.

It was just there, like air, but still tangible. A mass of calm. A massed, welcoming peace. We had come inside from an airless world—the normal-to-us-world where there is nothing to breathe, nothing for the essence of a person, where the soul slowly starves—into an ocean of oxygenated, smooth, invisible nectar in Pondicherry.

With every breath, we drank it in. Suddenly we were living at the breast of the Mother again. We weren't starving any more. Spiritually emaciated, we swam in ambrosia and absorbed it with our skin. It massed in our chest. We were carried and supported in truly another way.

And all without excitement or drama. No one noticed. They just radiated on us. The residents of the Ashram quarter of the city live in that something every day. They are fish in a grace pond, and they poured it on us with their eyes and smiles.

This was the first trip to India for Karen and me, our first trip to the Orient. We had only two weeks in Pondicherry, and I was home like no home I ever had, like the home I had always wanted but had never dared imagine.

Outside of Pondicherry, too, in the fields and villages of south India, that something glows in the eyes of the people.

But I never expected to see it in the eyes of the cattle.

In the United States, cattle eyes are dull or wary. In south India, the eyes of some of the bullocks were wells of stillness, pools of patience. They were windows on timelessness. You could peer in there and slide down into some soft vast. Driving north one day to Mahabalipuram, a coastal city famous for its carved stone temples, we saw a bullock patiently pulling a cart along the road. A man with a white cloth around his head and a black

moustache sat cross-legged on the wooden bench in the cart. His chest was bare. It was startling to see the utter absence of rushing in his eyes, more startling to see it in his bullock's eyes. The serenity there was like heavy fruit hanging from some tree of paradise. One could almost look in there and see

...the slow footsteps of far Destiny  
Approaching through huge distances  
of Time.<sup>3</sup>

The countryside itself seemed to be filled with this timelessness. It was rich and slow-moving. It spread wide and flat and green to the horizon. Rice paddies separated by lines of palm trees, scattered mud brick homes with thatched roofs, scrubbed and uniformed school children walking to class on a village street, women in bright blue saris carrying enormous stacks of kindling on their heads, very little machinery.

I don't know what it was...

The animals and the plants and the people seemed to grow from the skin of the earth as something integral to it. They were not really separate objects. They were to the skin of the earth as hair is to the skin of an animal. They were the same something, all of a piece. They were all a single being, moving through space on an immense, rippling carpet of time. Each part, each individual, had its own range of speed and sphere of action within the movement of the whole. All participated in the timelessness, though each in its own way and to its own degree.

The slow pace of life of the people in the countryside made all of this more visible. But it was something more than that. I had seen that rural pace in Peru and Bolivia, also in Mexico to a lesser extent. But something was added in the villages and fields of south India. There was a grace in the land that seemed to find its expression in the grace with which the young women walked and the old women smiled—a smile that seems to slip through the wrinkles of an old face for a second, quietly and serenely blinding you momentarily with the awesome light that lies behind.



But then our time was up. The two weeks slipped away. My best efforts to stop or slow the inexorable march of hours collapsed. We left that soul-home and came to the other home, our townhouse in California. The grace cream vanished. The air became capped and stagnant. The face of the Mother receded and disappeared behind rushing cars, billboards, lists of household tasks to catch up on, a thousand forms of material abundance, a hundred forms of hurry. It was bizarre to be surrounded by relatively beautiful houses and clean streets and well-dressed people. Unlike India, physical abundance here was everywhere, but we were no longer drinking that something! Instead everything was made of shiny, sharp corners and padlocked eyes and a frantic self importance. I sat in the living room stunned and jet-lagged, asphyxiated by reentry.

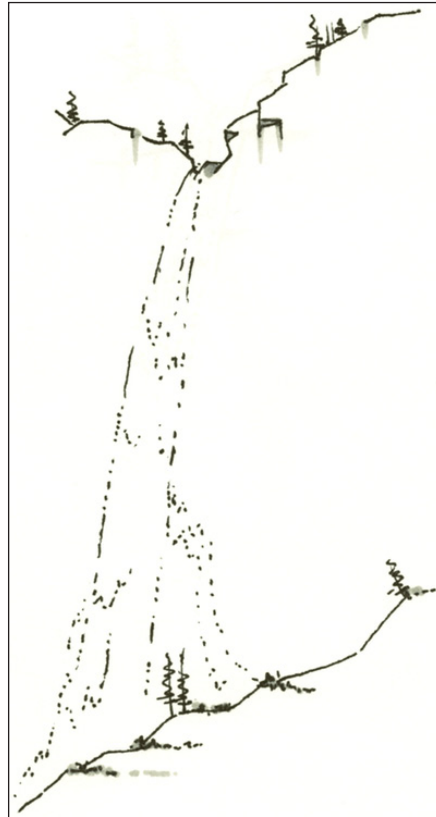
## Inspiration

Into that depressing gray morning came an unexpected inspiration. A glimpse of something about another trip. The idea floated around my head, took on substance, and began to put down roots in my imagination. Why not plan another pilgrimage, this time to the sacred places of the American West? A full-body immersion in places that we had visited other times but only fleetingly or only in daydreams.

There are places of grace here in the West, too. Some of them are public parks and monuments visited by millions of people every year. Other less public places have seemed to pull on me as I passed through on the way somewhere else. Still others have called just by their names or in someone else's description of them or in some more mysterious way.

I was intrigued. The idea promised answers to questions that have bothered me for years.

For one thing, how can grace be confined to far away places like Pondicherry or Lourdes? We cannot live without it, either literally or metaphorically. Sunlight is gratis, absolutely free. Not one of us earns it. Likewise eyesight, and oxygen, and the intricately coordinated pattern of nerve



*Illustration by Karen Cornell.*

firings and muscle contractions that enables us to walk, and the unlikely materialization of apples from wood and leaves in apple trees. And thousands of other delights and abilities and assists—graces—that come to us freely in life.

Literally we cannot live without it. But metaphorically as well, we cannot really live without some sliver of the “invisible” grace that we found overflowing in Pondicherry. Even a fully rational existence, determined by reason in every detail, but without mystery, without surprise, without gift, is not life. It is what we intend for machines.

Because it is necessary for living, grace cannot be the exclusive preserve of any one place, not even India. “The entire cosmos, whatever is still or moving, is pervaded by the divine,” says the Isha Upanishad. The Divine is the Maker of all, and each of His children expresses some unique part of His mystery. Everywhere He waits for us to find Him.

Then why not deliberately look for the epiphany here?

For another thing, many of us cannot just pick up and go to India or the Holy Land every time we want to live in grace for a week. And while some of India's teachings about the life of the spirit are universal and available to the whole human family, while some of these teachings even spell out, I believe, the future of the earth in the most luminous, marvelous English...

If in the meaningless Void creation  
rose,  
If from a bodiless Force Matter was  
born,  
If Life could climb in the unconscious tree,  
Its green delight break into emerald leaves  
And its laughter of beauty blossom  
in the flower,  
If sense could wake in tissue, nerve  
and cell  
And Thought seize the grey matter of  
the brain,  
And soul peep from its secrecy  
through the flesh,  
How shall the nameless Light not  
leap on men,  
And unknown powers emerge from  
Nature's sleep?<sup>4</sup>

... still I am an American of Western European ancestry. I will never be Indian nor speak Sanskrit, India's sacred language, during this life. I will never know all the richness of an Indian puja or understand the subtler dimensions of their national devotion to Krishna.

As an American, I am looking for our part. Is there an American path to the Divine? Where are the seeds in our high-energy adolescence, the cracks in our materialist armor that we can use as doors to that quiet, stunning smile of light? How does one find the grace here in this Western land? How are we already finding it here? What are the currents of American life from which, some day, may grow a full life of the spirit?

For this path, if there is to be one, must grow from within us.

Insofar as we are the same as other peoples in our essential humanness, our



inner being and our ultimate destiny are common. In those respects we can gratefully follow the wisdom and the light from India or wherever else we find it. But insofar as we are different from other peoples, a unique people<sup>5</sup> with a unique destiny, to that extent we have to find our own way into “the heart of the mystery of the journeying years.”<sup>6</sup>

I feel a sense of urgency about it.

The bullocks’ eyes in India and the singing cliffs of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado suggested that perhaps the land itself is one of those cracks. The bullocks’ eyes added to a suspicion I already had: that it wasn’t just the religions of India or their great spiritual teachers that made India a place of fabled spirituality. There is something in that land itself<sup>7</sup> that is “holy.” Something that expresses itself in the bullocks’ eyes as well as in the great Indian scriptures and spiritual technologies. Something older than human scriptures and human traditions. Something in the land itself that aspires beyond itself toward the heavens. Something akin to the awesome heavenward climb of the Himalayas that had a voice long before the first human language arrived.

The singing cliffs of the Grand Canyon point me in a similar direction. There is something congruent between us, between this landscape and the human sensibility. To say that the gigantic cliffs of the Grand Canyon sing is not simply poetic fantasy or anthropomorphism. One is not merely pasting some incongruous category of human activity on an alien, unrelated dead record of earth changes. Our affinity runs deeper than that. One can actually hear them, although it is not human singing and it is not the one-dimensional rationalist ear that hears it.

What is it then? I do not think that we can yet define it in the scientific terms that we are most comfortable with. But if it is true that Gaia is alive and that we are her sons and daughters, then we may well catch strains of her song by listening in another way.

John Muir heard it:

See, hear, how sharp, loud, and

clear-ringing are the tones of the sky—piercing peaks and spires; and how deep and smooth and massive those of the swelling domes and round-backed ridge-waves; and how quickly the multitude of small features in a landscape suggest hurrying trills and ripples and waves of melody. We not only see the forms and colors of the mountains, but hear them... Everything breaks forth into form, color, song, and fragrance—an eternal chorus of praise going up from every garden and grove, a wide range of harmonies leading into the inner harmonies that are eternal.<sup>8</sup>

Here is Peter Matthiessen:

The sun is round. I ring with life, and the mountains ring, and when I can hear it, there is a ringing that we share. I understand all this, not in my mind but in my heart, knowing how meaningless it is to try to capture what cannot be expressed, knowing that mere words will remain when I read it all again, another day.<sup>9</sup>

Some find it easier to talk to children about the other way to listen. Byrd Baylor wrote a children’s book telling the story of one determined girl who learned to hear the hills sing.

Of course their kind of singing isn’t loud.

It isn’t any sound you can explain.

It isn’t made with words.

You couldn’t write it down.

All I can say is it came straight up from those dark shiny lava rocks humming. It moved around like wind.

It seemed to be the oldest sound in the world.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes I also hear the mountains sing. It is metaphor to my literal mind—because I don’t hear a sound exactly the same as a literal sound—yet it is a definite perception. “Song” is the closest description, a subtle sound, a vibration behind the threshold of physical perception where an-

other kind of listening becomes possible.

This subtle sound is something more than the visual beauty of the hills metaphorically transposed to another sense. It is active, rather than passive like beauty. It reminds me of an aspiration, a quiet joy-filled energy that is a blend of yearning and celebration. It is like a chant. Indian poet K.D. Sethna hears, in his “best and calmest moods, a low universal croon, a far-away rhythm with a deep monotone overlaid with small variations: even the variations repeat one and the same softly trembling theme: some ultimate Mother Spirit seems to be gently singing to her child the cosmos...”<sup>11</sup>

It is like the music of being, which the greatest of our performed music, the music of doing, tries to express.

Stand in front of a massed field of golden poppies and it is hard to ignore. Yet we do ignore it, probably because it is so simple and uncomplicated. And because we don’t have a language pointing to it that we know and are comfortable with. And mostly because we simply don’t listen.

But there are places and times where the mysterious song is palpable, nearly undeniable. In those moments, no one needs to be told. Many listen spontaneously. At the parks and sacred places we can see another portion of the vastness. Dramatically or quietly we can hear the song, and we can feel the great body.

## A secret marvel

We have arrived just half an hour before sunset. On the western horizon, the sun has finally broken out from beneath the gray dome of clouds that has held close the valley all day.

We seem to be standing on the edge of the world.

The overlook at Glacier Point hangs 3,200 feet directly above Yosemite Valley. In the fading light we can see the dark meadows and the famous falls of John Muir’s Incomparable Valley: double-stepped Yosemite Falls and gossamer Royal Arches Cascade across the valley, to the north Snow Creek Cascades far up Tenaya Canyon, and to the east Vernal Falls





and Nevada Falls pouring the booming waters of the Merced River over immense drop-offs of granite. Farther east, the bank of clouds hides Mount Lyell and the other peaks of the High Sierra in the distance behind Half Dome. To the west, the dissolving cloud cover slowly changes from yellow to gold to pink.

But right now all eyes are on Half Dome, the monolith that stands, at 8842 feet, nearly a mile above the east end of the valley.

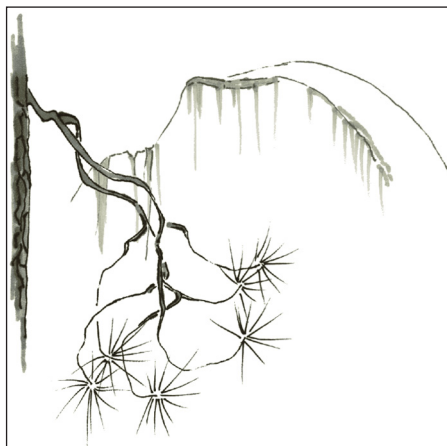
A ray of sunlight has splashed gold on the upsweep of granite below the giant's face and across the bare ridge of Clouds' Rest that extends behind it into the High Sierra. The patch of gold rises toward the face. Its color, glowing richer by the moment, jumps out against darkening sky and granite like an apparition.

Thirty people stand on the rock ledges of Glacier Point. We join them. Everyone is silent, intent on the rising gold light. It looks like some cosmic ceremony, something far grander than any human event that we have ever seen, a knighting of the magnificent old warrior and sentinel of the valley. We are the witnesses, but somehow we are participants too. Spontaneously, easily, we shed our self-importance and take our places in that scene of grandeur. Any necessary talking is done in a few whispers, and then the speakers fall silent again.

The light reaches the sheared-off face that gives Half Dome its name. It glows as if from a glory within as the color intensifies. Then quickly it fades, but one has the impression, contrary to our scientific understanding, that the glory has gone inside the mountain. It has certainly gone inside of us. People linger, still caught in the spell. For a while the silence remains with us. We savor it. Then small groups of people walk slowly, quietly back along the path toward the parking lot.

The glow has gone deep into my chest and burst into song. Inwardly, a hundred voices are singing, "Holy art Thou, Lord God Almighty..."

What is going on here? Something that is not so uncommon in the magnificent places of the American West. I believe



*Illustration by Karen Cornell.*

that it is a communion, a half-conscious reestablishment of the ancient connection between the deeper levels of human sensibility and the mystery at the heart of things. Something in us knows these deeper levels and has touched the mystery before, but the knowing is intuitive or non-objective and therefore hard to express, out of favor in a culture that looks to a different way of knowing for its answers.

As I type these words, a dark gray cat approaches and lies down in the grass by my knee. He is purring. His green eyes are alert. His ears independently track the sounds of traffic and insect.

When he turns his eyes to meet mine, something glowing inside this green-eyed being is visible. One can go in there and travel around in that glow, just as one can in a physical place or in the realm of ideas and memories. It is not imagination, a made-up place, but an independent geography with many levels. When we manage to slip into Green Eyes or the glowing face of Half Dome at sunset, we travel into this mysterious geography.

Something in the witnesses at Glacier Point knew that this wasn't just a sunset. The event was not merely the coincidence of the physical angle of the earth's rotation and atmosphere with the arriving photons from the sun. Everybody there knew instinctively that something holy, something full of grace had happened. We don't know exactly what it is. It eludes our literal frame of reference.

"Cosmic ceremony" and "knighting" are metaphorical terms reaching for the

inexpressible. Karen took pictures, but no film successfully conveys what we saw at Glacier Point. We are at the edges of human expression, the point at which we turn to poetry and metaphor to suggest the inexpressible, or simply return into the silence from which the experience came.

If you have traveled in that inner geography, you know what I am talking about. If you haven't, a secret marvel is awaiting your discovery.

## **Pilgrimage to the Southwest**

With these implications and possibilities swirling around that original gleam of inspiration for the trip, Karen and I set out.

We had two months.

Two months is a short time relative to the vastness of the American land, so we limited ourselves to the West, mainly the Southwest. We needed immersion time at each place to let the inspiration bloom, to find the secret door. A quick, scenic drive through a national park isn't enough. We were embarking on more of a pilgrimage than a vacation. That needs time.

There is something quietly confrontational as well as magnificent about the Southwest. The vastness of scale, the starkness of it, with so much of the softening vegetation stripped away by the desert climate, leave little room for pretense. The naked surroundings direct your attention back to fundamentals. Even now much of it is sparsely populated and difficult to reach. Although many famous landmarks lie along the major highways of the region, the window of the car frames them too safely. We had to get out and walk to begin to absorb the awesome and dangerous quality of the landscape.

During the trip we were travelers on several levels. Our bodies covered nearly 6,000 miles in eight weeks. We spent many hours driving and many more walking.

This physical travel was the springboard for a second kind of travel. As we rode and walked, we were looking for doorways to the sacred. We tried to pick places that seemed likely to have these openings.

There was also a third level of travel, and a fourth. The third was the journey



of Karen and me, the journey of our relationship stripped to the bone in the desert. For me that was a passage of acceptance and steadiness, or at least an attempt to maintain them while carrying the dark. The fourth was the plunge into my own darkness, triggered by several conflicts between us, especially one eight-hour marathon in Taos, New Mexico. I have focused on the sacred places and the experience of grace. Locating them was the purpose of the journey. But they were not separate from the descent into conflict and darkness, the wrestling with my own untrustworthiness, inertia, and cowardice. Nor from, finally, the sense of protection that I feel underlying all the rest.

It is true that openings to the Divine can happen anywhere, any time. We call these openings grace because they are free—grace and gratis have the same Latin root—of our rules and escape our best understanding. They can happen in our living room or on our death bed, in a concentration camp or during concentration in church, in a remote wilderness or in a packed political meeting. Still, many wisdom traditions agree on certain conditions that, while they do not compel the eruption of grace, nonetheless seem to make us more attentive and receptive to these eruptions when they occur.

One of these traditional agreements is that some physical locations are conducive to spiritual experience. We have many famous examples of these sacred places: Mount Sinai in Egypt, Mount Kailas of Tibet, Jerusalem, Benares of India, the San Francisco Peaks of northern Arizona, the great pyramids of Egypt, Lourdes of France, Mount Shasta in Northern California.

While the tradition of sacred places is a common human theme, during our trip we found a curious lack of recognition that sacred places of the American West are for us. Wherever I inquired about local sacred sites, my respondents, if they had anything to say at all, would talk about places sacred to the Indians, especially the Indians of the past. They assumed that

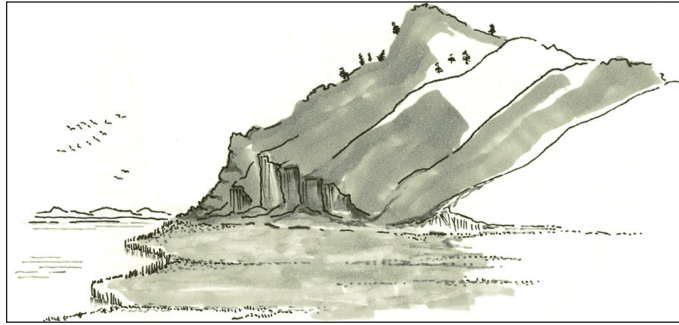


Illustration by Karen Cornell.

sacred was a reference to other peoples and other times.

Now that I think about it, this is not so curious at all, just a cultural artifact of American life in the early years of the new century. It is the capped and stagnant air, the thousand forms of material abundance, the sharp corners and padlocked eyes that we live in every day. Even some of those fortunate enough to live close to the sacred places of the American West think “sacred” a rather insubstantial notion...

...unless you can get past the cultural barriers and walk with some Native Americans on their own terms. Traveling with several Indian guides on their terms, we visited some astonishing places. The specialness of those places was indisputable. Still, their significance is entwined with cultural and historical associations and meanings that are unfamiliar to me. I am no more American Indian than Asian Indian. I wanted to shout, “What about the rest of us? I am looking for places that are sacred to us!”

To all of us.

Today.

I want to breathe again!

So in some respects we were on our own, searching for the sacred in the land. I walked the trails and the backcountry not knowing exactly where to go or what to look for. If there is no sign or living human tradition, how do you know when you find a sacred place? That was something that I hoped to find out. And grace, of course, came in unexpected ways.

But while we didn't find many human guides to help with the search in person, gradually over those two months we did find guidance in one place. We found a

growing body of nature writing seasoned with hints of sacred places and experiences. Much of it is still hesitant and lacks a clearly-defined terminology of the sacred. Some of it is crude or even smacks of sensationalism or exploitation. In the best of this literature, the experience of the sacred is more often alluded to than openly identified. It seems to be often a surprised by-product rather than the de-

liberate focus of the writing. Still, the allusion is clearly there in title, in illustration and photography, and in words: A spiritual awareness of nature with a distinctly American voice is quietly accumulating and showing itself in much of American nature writing.

We have our own immigrant and home-grown nature mystics.

## Notes and References

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 380.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 322-323.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 648.
5. “[The nation] too is a being, a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifestation of the cosmic Spirit, and it is there to express and fulfil in its own way and to the degree of its capacities the special truth and power and meaning of the cosmic Spirit that is within it.” Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 35.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
7. “Mother India is not a piece of earth; she is a Power, a Godhead, for all nations have such a Devi supporting their separate existence and keeping it in being.” Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, p. 423. Devi means goddess.
8. L. M. Wolfe, *John of the Mountains*, p. 439.
9. P. Matthiessen, in S. Trimble, *Words from the Land*, p. 253.
10. B. Baylor and P. Parnall, *The Other Way to Listen*, p. 26.
11. K.D. Sethna, *The Secret Splendour*, p. 222.



# Being Present

by James Anderson

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**A**bstract: The state of being present is examined and traced back to personal experience. The author feels that it holds immense implications for man's health and well-being. He looks at the psychological, physical and spiritual aspects when considering this poise. He concludes that an integral approach is needed if this goal is to be achieved.

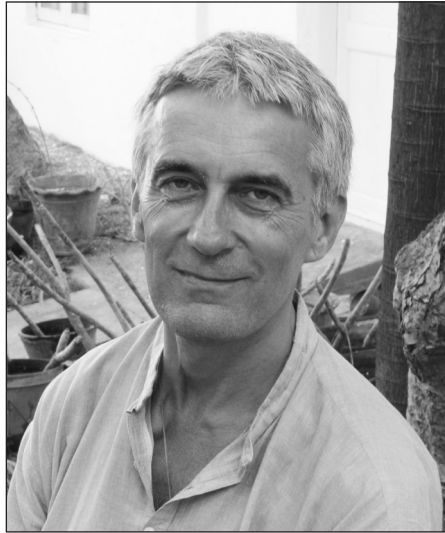
*"There are unique moments in life that pass like a dream. One must catch them on the wing, for they never return" (1).*

## Introduction

Being present is a definitive stance in our relation to time and space. I believe it has an enormous effect on our psychological and physical health. It also unlocks a door to spiritual growth. In a world of materialistic solutions, such a simple truth can easily get lost. Aware of the shortness of their material existence, men lead 'harassed' lives "instead of letting each thing live in its own eternity. They are always wanting: forward, forward,... And the work is spoilt" (2). To be present is an easy concept to grasp, but one that often goes unheeded. The poise needs to be reinforced by vigilance and practice. The poise has an intrinsic place in the vision of Integral Health.

## Psychological health

It is clear that man's consciousness is comprised of many parts and rarely a unified whole. There is little that is authentic and true; even his nature is largely borrowed from outside. Whenever I am able to disengage from its flux, I observe a whole range of movements heading in different directions. If unheeded, it is clearly a



James Anderson.

recipe for psychological imbalance. These movements emanate from different levels of consciousness and can initiate states of inertia, passion, exhilaration, depression and even chaos. Our inner psyche is tossed between polarities and is prey to forces from outside. There is no unified means of control. The executive side of our nature, the will, is no different. It is split into 'willings'(3) where desires, impulses and aspirations collide and compete with one another for abeyance.

All these fragments derive from and project themselves into different time-zones. But the present can be a valuable source of unity to man's nature. That is why it is such an important key to psychological health. I find that the focus of the present moves me toward a more unified consciousness and will.

When present, one stands on solid ground. One does not get overrun by any activity. The poise persists through active and passive states. Some refer to 'mindfulness' but there is surely a greater agency than the mind in attuning fully to the present. When one performs a task, one drops everything else and does that alone. One is solely absorbed in what is at hand.

When engrossed in an activity, a significant shift might ensue. Even an intricate or mundane task can become vast in that single moment. From experience, it also draws the strands of my nature closer

together. When I apply all my consciousness onto a particular act, I find myself moving into a wider and freer space. Becoming vast is a key to health; it is critical to our vitality. It is also a way to transformation and necessitates the removal of all restrictive boundaries. I believe that it is the state of being present which stimulates this change.

But man carries so much baggage from the past he feels unable to embrace the moment in a total and undivided way. His consciousness is scattered amidst the three zones of time. The past might produce a heightened sense of expectation and induce a desire for repeated sensation or experience. He might carry the weight of past failures and transpose it into the future. It is hardly surprising that he is then unable to access sufficient energy and summon all his resources into the present. Staying present, amongst other things, is about being attentive and alert to what is going on inside. At first, when I started looking squarely within, it was bewildering to notice these random movements, but gradually I became aware of a silent spectator that disinterestedly watches the play from deep inside. The knowledge provided me a platform of stability, something I could fall back on if my nature got dispersed. I believe that we all have this base. When we touch it we are indeed present. After I became conscious of this truth, I yearned to nurture and hold onto the connection. I had a feeling that so much more could be tapped from this source. At first, it seems to be more aligned to the mind but eventually a transition unfolds where something new and vast starts to take charge. At this borderline, through practice, one approaches an indefinable realm of harmony and totality.

I find watchfulness to be a gateway to psychological freedom, a painstaking but failsafe means of reaching out for inner wholeness. It offers me a detailed and beautiful way of un-knotting the ties of the past. Once begun, I find that no detail can ever be ignored. Any link with the past can be deadweight to the present. These knots are caused by attachments and associations, by memories and habits. In my





experience though, the claws of the past are almost countless. When I started this work, for example, I was very surprised to notice how many of my emotional reactions were induced through habit. But then I saw that most levels of the being, down to the subconscious, were at least influenced by it. Indeed, I found that the majority of my inner movements could be traced back to the past. There was little that was essentially true. It was a very uncomfortable knowledge: it was like I was programmed! Like every person on this planet, I had been shaped and conditioned from birth although there was nothing particularly unique about my upbringing. I realised that being tied to the past was to be psychologically enslaved. I now feel that the influence is gradually turning in a different direction, but it is an immense task.

I don't believe that any of us are given life to stand still. The key to psychological health, in my eyes, is through harmony and progress. It is about embracing constant and positive change. This process requires work which, though at times uncomfortable, offers me the ultimate fulfilment. It is a lifetime's work and a supreme joy.

I am beginning to understand how and why these patterns became so entrenched in my being. The way to this knowledge has been through the physical itself. I have found the body to be the best barometer of what is happening inside. For me, it is the only way of truly understanding the sources of my inner movements. I have found that every one of them produces a sensation on the surface. It is a matter of being attentive and there is often a precise correlation. A feeling of love and radiance produces a warm glow on the physical and any distortion inside creates a surface unease and sometimes at a precise point. I found that by working through the body I could get to the source of every internal affliction.

So I firstly observe every sensation as I disinterestedly scan the body from top to bottom. I drop everything and just focus on what is before me. In other words, I stay present. I enquire more closely into

where there is any break of force or energy. There may be a single point of disruption which is upsetting the whole system. I go to wherever I feel called and probe deeper. At that point I might come across a sensation of pain or nausea. There may be a certain hue or colour. I try to get inside the nature of the vibration. I find the poise important. I am conscious of never identifying with the sensation that presents itself. Certainly, I intend to fully experience it but, at the same time, I am conscious of keeping my station above the picture that is emerging. In any case, it is not a task I can do single-handed. I am only a witness; the Consciousness-Force or hand of the Mother will invariably do the rest.

The practice of staying alert, connected and present usually produces an immense shift. The truth behind any unease will eventually emerge. Sometimes it may come with a word; at other times there may be a spontaneous insight. If done to the end, the work sheds light on even the darkest roots. Knowledge appears and the truth resolves leaving its unique imprint of truth, harmony and peace.

To be honest, I have found the effect of these formations seldom gets effaced overnight. Many have been ingrained over many years, sometimes from generations before my birth. So an attitude of persistence is necessary. Sri Aurobindo himself once wrote that the whole process was like straightening a dog's tail. One needs to be even more obstinate than the afflictions faced. Being present also implies the release of all expectations. I find the right attitude always gives the necessary strength. One often has to traverse some darkness but the light will always prevail. Armed with this truth, the work becomes a wonderful means for progress.

### Physical health

The body needs our presence. Apart from anything else, it requires our material support. Providing the necessary diet, rest and exercise are naturally indispensable to its well-being. Without setting a solid material groundwork, the body will only wither with neglect.

At a different level, if one aspires for an integral health, the body also needs our deepest consciousness. As one climbs higher, this factor becomes more and more necessary. If one doesn't truly nourish and nurture one's material roots, there is a danger of leaving behind a damaging schism. One might ascend in spirit but leave the physical to rot away like an unwanted garment. If that happens, an important reason for our existence here seems to be lost. Sooner or later, the presence instilled inside needs to spread outwards.

The body is not a machine because its cells are impregnated with a unique presence which is at the heart of all creation. There is a sweetness and delight that is pervasive although masked by thick layers of unconsciousness and inertia. The aim is to convert this instrument into one of consciousness. It is our presence which does this.

By infusing the body with consciousness, I find its vibration increases. The way for me is to simply observe through the eyes of the soul. The body naturally opens to its patient and persistent gaze. It then becomes more plastic to the higher forces that are waiting to work on it. Its receptivity expands; the physical energy itself becomes more subtle and yet more enduring.

Many of us have issues with our body. The very difficulties faced with mine sometimes deter me from being present. Sometimes it seems irresistible to take refuge in the clouds. I now find this notion illusory because, whenever I do try to escape, the flow of energy gets interrupted and allows pain and cramp to intrude. It's like I'm spurning an important wisdom that needs to be absorbed in this lifetime. So to be present is to be grounded. That's why I admire those whose example continues to teach me this important lesson.

In Integral Health, everything must be worked upon in unison. This is because every part of our nature is interrelated. It is important not to overlook the truest connection of all: with our soul or spirit. Wholeness, after all, is inconceivable without accessing that part that makes us truly whole.



I notice that every inner movement creates an effect on the outside. From a consciousness perspective, the work I do is identical to that of making myself psychologically unified and present. The aim is to restore the soul to its true position, as master of the house. If this happens, I believe that anything is possible! So after aligning the consciousness, my attention expands outwards and I maintain the contact as I gently initiate a movement or posture with the body.

Being present with the body is not just spatial: it is also a matter of giving it a truer station to what we construe as time. The past, for example, might hold for us many fears and these fears will invariably be hidden and trapped in the cells of our body. Without the necessary attention and consciousness, these anxieties and traumas can get unleashed and cause havoc.

The physical nature has a profound resonance to habit. Anyone on the path of personal growth knows what a blight habits can be. Indeed, they are symptomatic of our very slavery to the past. So I feel the only solution is to take a stance entirely in the present. Even these kinds of patterns, I believe, can be uprooted through detailed work inside. Such is the influence of our psychology; the body can get enmeshed in memories, traumas and associations if they are not deliberately cleared away. And when they are gone the body can reclaim its position in the eternal moment.

The 'Yoga of the cells' is lovingly documented in a series of works titled *Mother's Agenda*. The level of presence required for this work must have been phenomenal. This seems to me to be the epitome of 'work in detail':

"I constantly catch my cells being like that. Naturally I react, but for them it's a very normal state: always straining after the next moment, never the quietude of

the present moment. ...As soon as the Consciousness comes (gesture of descent) and concentrates, as soon as I bring the Consciousness into the present moment, everything becomes quiet, immobile, eternal. But if I am not CONSTANTLY attentive, the condition [of restlessness] comes almost as a subconsciousness: it's always there. And VERY tiring — it must be one of the most important sources of fatigue in mankind. Especially here (Mother touches her forehead and temples), it's very tiring. Only when one can live in the eternity of the present minute does it all stop — everything becomes white, immobile, calm, everything is fine.

"But it means constant vigilance — constant. It's infinitely more difficult than

lar direction.

Whenever I begin to identify with these regions, I take a small step out of linear, sequential time. Getting out of the framework allows my being to expand and become freer. If I allow the centre of my awareness to be drawn back to the surface, I immediately become more restricted. When I am dispersed and do a task in a distracted way, I become a victim of time as we know it. On the other hand, I become vaster when I stay present to whatever is at hand. It may be piecemeal, but a strand of infinity is clutched at that single moment.

The aim of every spiritual endeavour is to rise in consciousness and any progress is clearly a consequence of being present.

Ultimately the poise helps me identify with the Eternal which is contained in all things. This alone is true and Truth is incompatible with any kind

*By infusing the body with consciousness, I find its vibration increases. The way for me is to simply observe through the eyes of the soul. The body naturally opens to its patient and persistent gaze. It then becomes more plastic to the higher forces that are waiting to work on it.*

when one worked even in the vital; in the vital, it's nothing, it's child's play in comparison. But here, phew!... because, you see, in the mind or the vital, it's all movements of organization, of action, of choice, of decision — it's very easy to decide, to rule! But that cellular tension is there EVERY SECOND: it's the activity inherent in material existence" (4).

### Spiritual health

In the higher dimensions, it is my understanding that everything exists in the eternal Now. Things do not run in a straight line as we find in material existence. Time is not fixed; it is also not even real as is commonly perceived. Past, present and future stretch out simultaneously in the higher planes in a multidimensional context. In them, everything presents itself as whole, not in its individual parts (5). It will obviously benefit our wellbeing if we can adjust our perspective in a simi-

of ill-health. Spiritual health completes the equation that gives Integral Health its complete fullness.

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## On Buddha and love

By Pravir Malik

From the blog, <http://blog.aurosoorya.com>

Through even small periods of time a great secret that is imprinted in the DNA of existence reveals itself in the journey of a flower. This secret is the traversing of three different states of being represented by the seed, the stalk, and the flower (photograph on right from Japanese Tea Garden in San Francisco).

There is no randomness in these states. The seed represents the status quo, and is the urge to exist (physical). The stalk is the urge to adventure forth, explore, assert in search of uniqueness (vital). The flower is the urge to come into uniqueness (mental).

And behind it all is this all pervasive Love or Bliss. As more of the uniqueness comes forward, various constraining configurations of physical-vital-mental patterns are broken, and Love can be felt more fully. For Love needs an abundance of developed forms to express itself more fully.

The plenitude from which everything is supposed to have emanated exists even in the travails of time. Seers have described this plenitude as Sat-Chit-Ananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, and the journey of the flower is nothing but a reflection of this essential plenitude, with the seed or physical, being a reflection of Existence, the vital-mental of Consciousness, which readies everything for Love or Bliss.

And yet the Love is so fundamental that it can be said that this is the compass by which all else is created. When Buddha, who had grown up in the oasis of his father's palace, was exposed to three signs external to his world he suffered an existential crisis. At his birth there was a prediction that he would grow up to be a sage. His father, the king, wanted him too to be king, and so sheltered him from any form of suffering. He, hence, grew up in a utopia in which his physical-vital-mental formations were of a very particular kind.

For that great secret of Sat-Chit-



*The Buddha, in the San Francisco Japanese Tea Garden (Photo by Benita Marquez, posted at Flickr.com under pseudonym 'crazypaws').*

Ananda that expresses itself through time, also expresses itself in any bound space through often distorted physical-vital-mental configurations. These configurations become the stuff of our being, animate it, and are the bases by which we interact with the world.

When Buddha was confronted by the beggar, the sick, and the dying, the feelings that were evoked in him challenged his established physical-vital-mental programming and he did what few beings will ever dare to or even contemplate doing. He walked away from the configured utopia created by his father, that perhaps was nothing more than a fractal reflection of his own physical-vital-mental programming, to solve once and for all why he felt the way he did.

And it was this feeling that was key. Today, when and if any one of us feels depressed, or sad, or anxious, or angry, instead of taking this as a sign from the Love that exists behind all, that something

in our physical-vital-mental configurations needs to change, we often dull, excite, or distract ourselves so that we do not have to face the inevitable.

Yet Love needs an instrument that is free. Any feeling of negativity is a sign-post thrown up from Love to examine in what way the instrument is misaligned with the deeper intent that Love is seeking to establish. For it can be said that out of the initial inertia of darkness that is supposed to have been the fall from the original plenitude, it is Love that has constructed all that we are and will be.

For form to come into being atoms had to unite—an act of Love. For us to live as developing beings, the physical, the vital, and the mental elements had to combine to give us some bearing with which to stand in the world—also an act of Love. For Love itself to manifest more of its nature, the very physical, vital, mental elements that held us in a certain productive orientation for some time have too to be challenged so that greater possibilities of even the physical, the vital, and the mental, may recombine to express more of Love.

So when Buddha experienced an existential crisis and walked away from it all, it was nothing but Love that was seeking a different basis by which to enter into our world. Attachment, he said, is the cause of suffering. In becoming un-attached the negative feelings are replaced by their opposites, and in that rebirth our very bases is changed, piece by piece, to progressively become greater vehicles of Love.





## Source Material

### Surrender and self-giving

by Sri Aurobindo

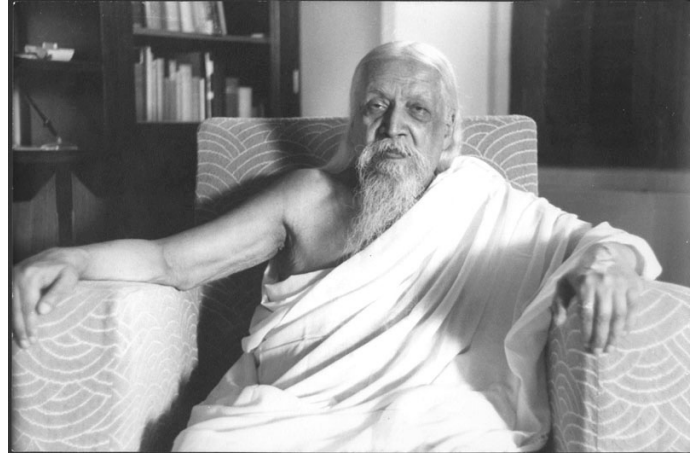
I may stress one point, however, that there need not be only one way to realisation of the Divine. If one does not succeed or has not yet succeeded in reaching him, feeling him or seeing him by the established process of meditation or by other processes like japa, yet one may have made progress towards it by the frequent welling up of bhakti in the heart or a constantly greater enlargement of it in the consciousness or by work for the Divine and dedication in service. You have certainly progressed in these two directions, increased in devotion and shown your capacity for service. You have also tried to get rid of obstacles in your vital nature and so effect a purification, not without success, in several difficult directions. The path of surrender is indeed difficult, but if one perseveres in it with sincerity, there is bound to be some success and a partial overcoming or diminution of the ego which may help greatly a farther advance upon the way. I can see no sufficient reason for the discouragement which so often overtakes you and sometimes makes you think that you are not cut out for the path; to indulge such a thought is always a mistake. A too ready proneness to discouragement and a consequent despondency is one of the weaknesses of your vital nature and to get rid of it would be a great help. One must learn to go forward on the path of Yoga, as the Gita insists, with a consciousness free from despondency—*anirvinnacetasā*. Even if one slips, one must rectify the posture; even if one falls, one has to rise and go undiscouraged on the divine way. The attitude must be, “The Divine has promised himself to me if I cleave to him always; that I will never cease to do whatever may come.” (*Letters on Yoga II, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vol. 29, pp. 212-213)

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It is altogether unprofitable to enquire who or what class will arrive first or last at the goal. The spiritual path is not a field of competition or a race that this should matter. What matters is

one's own aspiration for the Divine, one's own faith, surrender, selfless self-giving. Others can be left to the Divine who will lead each according to his nature. Meditation, work, bhakti are each means of preparative help towards fulfilment; all are included in this path. If one can dedicate oneself through work, that is one of the most powerful means towards the self-giving which is itself the most powerful and indispensable element of the sadhana.

To cleave to the path means to follow it without leaving it or turning aside. It is a path of self-offering of the whole being in all its parts, the offering of the thinking mind and the heart, the



will and actions, the inner and the outer instruments so that one may arrive at the experience of the Divine, the Presence within, the psychic and spiritual change. The more one gives of oneself in all ways, the better for the sadhana. But all cannot do it to the same extent, with the same rapidity, in the same way. How others do it or fail to do it should not be one's concern—how to do it faithfully oneself is the one thing important. (*Letters on Yoga II, CWSA, Vol. 29, pp. 213-214*)

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

In this Yoga one is supposed to go beyond every mental idealistic culture. Ideas and ideals belong to the mind and are half-truths only; the mind too is, more often than not, satisfied with merely having an ideal, with the pleasure of idealising, while life remains always the same, untransformed or changed only a little and mostly in appearance. The spiritual seeker does not turn aside from the pursuit of realisation to mere idealising; not to idealise, but to realise the Divine Truth is always his aim, either beyond or in life also—and in the latter case it is necessary to transform mind and life which cannot be done without surrender to the action of the Divine Force, the Mother.



To seek after the Impersonal is the way of those who want to withdraw from life, but usually they try by their own effort, and not by an opening of themselves to a superior Power or by the way of surrender; for the Impersonal is not something that guides or helps, but something to be attained and it leaves each man to attain it according to the way and capacity of his nature.

On the other hand by an opening and surrender to the Mother one can realise the Impersonal and every other aspect of Truth also.

The surrender must necessarily be progressive. No one can make the complete surrender from the beginning, so it is quite natural that when one looks into oneself, one should find its absence. That is no reason why the principle of surrender should not be accepted and carried out steadily from stage to stage, from field to field, applying it successively to all the parts of the nature. (*The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 140-141)

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It is necessary if you want to progress in your sadhana that you should make the submission and surrender of which you speak sincere, real and complete. This cannot be as long as you mix up your desires with your spiritual aspiration. It cannot be as long as you cherish vital attachment to family, child or anything or anybody else. If you are to do this Yoga, you must have only one desire and aspiration, to receive the spiritual Truth and manifest it in all your thoughts, feelings, actions and nature. You must not hunger after any relations with anyone. The relations of the sadhaka with others must be created for him from within, when he has the true consciousness and lives in the Light. They will be determined within him by the power and will of the Divine Mother according to the supramental Truth for the divine life and the divine work; they must not be determined by his mind and his vital desires. This is the thing you have to remember.

Your psychic being is capable of giving itself to the Mother and living and growing in the Truth; but your lower vital being has been full of attachments and sanskaras and an impure movement of desire and your external physical mind was not able to shake off its ignorant ideas and habits and open to the Truth. That was the reason why you were unable to progress, because you were keeping up an element and movements which could not be allowed to remain; for they were the exact opposite of what has to be established in a divine life. The Mother can only free you from these things, if you really want it, not only in your psychic being, but in your physical mind and all your vital nature. The sign will be that you no longer cherish or insist on your personal notions, attachments or desires, and that whatever the distance or wherever you may be, you will feel yourself open and the power and presence of the Mother with you and working in you and will be contented, quiet, confident, wanting nothing else, awaiting always the Mother's will. 6 January 1928 (*The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 141-142)

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However hard the fight, the only thing is to fight it out now and here to the end.

The trouble is that you have never fully faced and conquered the real obstacle. There is in a very fundamental part of your nature a strong formation of ego-individuality which has mixed in your spiritual aspiration a clinging element of pride and spiritual ambition. This formation has never consented to be broken up in order to give place to something more true and divine. Therefore, when the Mother has put her force upon you or when you yourself have pulled the force upon you, this in you has always prevented it from doing its work in its own way. It has begun itself building according to the ideas of the mind or some demand of the ego, trying to make its own creation in its "own way", by its own strength, its own sadhana, its own tapasya.

There has never been here any real surrender, any giving up of yourself freely and simply into the hands of the Divine Mother.

And yet that is the only way to succeed in the supramental Yoga. To be a Yogi, a Sannyasi, a Tapaswi is not the object here. The object is transformation, and the transformation can only be done by a force infinitely greater than your own; it can only be done by being truly like a child in the hands of the Divine Mother. 7 June 1928 (*The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 142-143)

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Difficult? It is the first principle of our sadhana that surrender is the means of fulfilment and so long as ego or vital demand and desire are cherished, complete surrender is impossible—the self-giving is incomplete. We have never concealed that. It may be difficult and it is; but it is the very principle of the sadhana.

Because it is difficult it has to be done steadily and patiently till the work is complete. (*Letters on Yoga II*, CWSA, Vol. 29, pp. 75-76)

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Your mind and psychic being are concentrated on the spiritual aim and open to the Divine—that is why the Influence comes down into the head and as far as the heart. But the vital being and nature and the physical consciousness are under the influence of the lower nature. As long as the vital and physical being are not surrendered or do not on their own account call for the higher life, this struggle is likely to continue.

Surrender everything, reject all other desires or interests, call on the divine Shakti to open the vital nature and bring down alm, peace, light, Ananda into all the centres. Aspire, await with faith and patience the result. All depends on a complete sincerity and an integral consecration and aspiration.

The world will trouble you so long as any part of you belongs to the world. It is only if you belong entirely to the Divine that you can become free. (*Letters on Yoga II*, CWSA, Vol. 29, p. 76)



## The self-giving of the body

by The Mother

**B**ut it's interesting, the work has entered an interesting phase. (After a silence) Yes, I wrote something (Mother looks for a piece of paper) .... The trouble is that once I've noted it, it's gone. And it was ... (Mother tries to remember).

Yes, it was someone who wrote to me ... I don't remember, it was about "consecration." But I remember that when I answered, I looked, and I saw ... (what should I call it?) the curve, but it's not exactly a curve .... You understand, consecration, self-giving, surrender (not "submission"), all that still implies a separate self giving itself. And I saw—in fact, I saw in the body's experience—that the body is on the verge of ... it's just in an intermediary state, because all the parts haven't exactly reached the same stage (I don't know why, but that's how it is). So I might say (but this is a simplification), I could say that overall, the body's self-giving is total, the consecration almost total in the sense that there's everywhere an active collaboration, but with an intense aspiration, and at times a moment when it goes like this (gesture expressing a swelling in the cells). I don't know what happens, it's something going on in the cells, and then ... there's no self-giving anymore or anything ... neither a "consecration" nor "listening to the command": it's a state, a state of intense vibration, with at the same time a sense of all-powerfulness, even in here (Mother pinches the skin of her hands), in this old thing, and ... a luminous all-powerfulness, always with this ... something in the line of goodness, of benevolence, but much above that (those things look like ridiculous distortions). It goes like this (same gesture of swelling), and static, that is, with the sense of eternity in the cells.

It doesn't last—it lasts for a few minutes at the most; yes, a few minutes, but it comes back. It comes back. it's something COMPLETELY new for the body.

All the time-constantly, all the time-there is the warmth, the sweetness and happiness of a complete self-giving, with an aspiration: "To BE, to be You, not to exist anymore." But there's still a sense of ... it's the joy of giving oneself. It's like that, constant. And when the consciousness isn't active, that is, when I don't speak or don't listen or ... automatically the body repeats the mantra like that, constantly like that; that's the constant state, day and night, continually. But now and then—now and then-there's a sort of fusion (I don't know what happens), and even that whole joyful aspiration, that whole fervor is transformed into a state ... which is, or seems, perfectly still, because ... I don't know what it is: it's not stillness, not eternity ... I don't know, it's something, a "something" that is ... Power, Light, and really a Love which doesn't "give" itself and does not "receive"; a Love which ... something (I use this word for lack of others), something like that, but it's That, it's a vibration which is That, a vibration of Power, Light and Love (those are the three words I must use to translate), which is IN this, in the body, everywhere. Everywhere. To such a point that when you leave that state, you wonder (laughing) if you still have



the same shape! That's how it is, you understand.

It's new—it began two days ago.

It's not constant. It comes when I am left in peace ([laughing] which doesn't happen often!), when I can melt into the joy of belonging to the Divine (something like that). There isn't even the idea of "being the Divine," it's not that! That seems so silly! The first time I read that, to me it was the height of egoism: You are the Divine! (Laughing) It's not the Divine who contains you, it's you who contain the Divine, don't forget! ... But there is the joy of wholly belonging to the Divine, and suddenly (gesture of breaking away) something takes place ... (Mother shows the absence of any more separation, of a "giving" and of a "someone" to give oneself to).

Strangely, as soon as there's the slightest slackening in the attitude, for instance, a second of forgetfulness (what I might call "forgetfulness," that is, the former old habit, the old terrestrial habit of being), the body instantly feels about to be dissolved. And *that*, strangely, is something ... The body is now aware that it can hold together, exist together ONLY through the Lord's Power, not through any natural law—that it knows-and so, at such times, br! there can come two or three seconds like that: you feel everything, but everything is about to be dissolved. And Strange.

With people, unless (this is rare), unless they are quite unbearable (but that's very rare), with people, this [body] no longer exists: what's there is the Divine Consciousness at work, observing, working, answering, and (laughing) sometimes full of mischief! A mischief so full of goodness, but quite mischievous. And an extraordinary sense of humor.

Well, there you are. So it's all right. In a way, it's all right. I feel it's still ... Let's see, let me try to mentalize a bit: the impression is as if the supreme Consciousness had undertaken the work of transformation of the body and were doing it thoroughly, but also without hesitation, without compromise or anything of the sort, and ... the question is whether the body will hold out. That's how it is. The body knows it—it knows and doesn't have a shadow of fear, I must say—it's all the same to it: "What You want will be fine." At times it feels a little suffering for one thing or another, a little friction (a pain here or there ... some pains





aren't too pleasant), and at such times it always says (Mother opens her hands): "As You will, Lord." And within a few minutes at the most, the thing calms down. But it has stopped wondering whether or not it will last, whether or not it will succeed—all that is over, gone: "It's as You will, as You will." It uses those words because we can use only one language, which is quite incapable of expressing things; we don't know anything else, so we use that language. When it says, "As You will," there's this movement of ... (gesture of dilation and expansion) what should I call it? ... It's like an easing in all the cells—they ease up. They ease up in the supreme Light, in the supreme Consciousness, like that. Then you feel the form is about to disappear, but ... (Mother looks at the skin of her hands) it must be the consciousness contained in the cells [that spreads about]; I don't think it's the substance, because (Mother looks at the skin of her hands) so far it has remained as it is! But that [easing] stays there for a rather long time.

But there are no words to express that, because I think ... (I don't know whether some people felt it, but if they did, they didn't know what it was because they didn't express it), I think it's new. It's new for the body. It's new. A sort of ... as if one were tense, and the tension were easing, easing up ... (same gesture of expansion and diffusion). Yes, it's quite like that, as when one is tense, like someone full of tension, and it eases up. Now it's like that for all the cells. 23 April 1969 (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 10, pp. 148-152)

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I've had this experience for several months now (especially since the start of the year) that the "shift" of the consciousness—instead of the consciousness being in the ordinary state, if you shift it (I am referring to the body's consciousness), if it's directly tuned to the Divine, in a few ... sometimes seconds, sometimes minutes, but in a few minutes, the disease absolutely disappears. And if you just do this (Mother slightly tilts one finger to the left), if you go back even a little, it instantly comes back. But if you keep your consciousness at the right place, it's gone.

That's an experiment I've made more than a hundred times, even with something like toothache (which is hard to cure), even sharp pains at one spot or another. That's the experiment made by the BODY. The body knows.

(long silence)

It's very interesting because it's an experiment it has made in every detail and at every stage.... The first thing it found was not to think of the disease, not to be concerned with it. That's the first stage. Afterwards, it found that when it was occupied with something else, the pain was greatly lessened. Later on, it had the experience that if someone comes near it, someone who knows you are in pain, it comes back! All that is very, very interesting: lots of small observations of every minute. And finally, it had this repeated and absolutely convincing proof that as soon as it concentrates on the Divine, as soon as it makes contact (because it FEELS, it has the sensation in the cells), as soon as it concentrates

(without being concerned with the diseased point: it's better not to be concerned with it), the pain totally disappears, to such a point that... At such times (those are things that cause pain, so the first effect is not to feel the pain), at times, in the beginning, the body would ask for the Intervention and there would be an effect, but there was the sense of a struggle, a resistance (something of the sort): it would take a little time. But when the body succeeded in concentrating WITHOUT DEMAND, you understand (simply giving itself), on the Divine, then it would stop thinking about the pain, the body itself stops thinking about the pain, and after a certain time, it realizes it's completely vanished! - It stopped thinking about it and it was gone.

That experience has been repeated HUNDREDS of times, for all kinds of different things.

(silence)

There must be a condition in which the possibility of accident disappears. But that ... that I don't know.

Those would be the natural conditions of supramental life.

So, necessarily, since it's taking place in the body, the very constitution of the body must change—it will have to change. How? That I don't know yet.

It's in the direction of Matter's perfect obedience to the Consciousness (the higher Consciousness); to the present experience, it's the divine consciousness, but it's very probably what Sri Aurobindo called the supramental consciousness. Because there must be ... (gesture in gradations) an indefinite ascent.

It's a consciousness in which the sense of ego completely disappears, it does not exist. There isn't "a person" in front of others, you understand, receiving and sending influences—it's no longer like that at all. It's a general play of forces (Mother makes a vast, fluid gesture) in which everyone spontaneously plays his part.

Several times the body has had that experience. It remains in that for a long time. Now it's almost... that relationship with things and beings (the old relationship) is on the verge of becoming a memory. It's no longer ... no longer natural.

(long silence)

I don't know how to explain.... There's something radically changed not only in the body's consciousness, but in its functioning. For the moment it's still hard to explain.... You see, the image of being at the center with things coming towards you and everything being in relationship with this [the egocentric center] is an old thing that went away long ago. But there were still ...

(silence)

It's not quite that, but somewhat: all the cells seem to be attuned—attuned to something higher than they, even in space, but which they feel as being their center. But a center ... not like this (Mother gestures onto herself) and not ... (what's the word?) localized; it's ... neither here [the body] nor above, nor ... It's not localized. Yet the cells' impression is that the Force—the impelling force or will-force—emanating from "that" spreads out (gesture fanning out downward) to enter into the body And ... (this is interesting) the body feels it's more DIRECTLY in relationship with "that" and, through it, that acts on others, on those around



—but it's not "others," it's ... The body has sometimes even had the impression that some of those things ["others," those around] are closer to it than others.... It's very hard to explain.... But it's spontaneous. You see, the difficulty is that in order to express it, I have to start thinking it, while it's spontaneous: it's a sensation, not a thought.

For instance, at night when I am alone, at times there's the impression of a disorder or an anguish somewhere [in "those around"], and then, the body's remedy (it clearly feels it comes from outside towards it—but "outside" isn't the word, it's a distance ... I don't know how to explain), its sole movement of remedy is to rush into this luminous center—it's not to "attract" something to it, it's ... to rush into that. 18 March 1970 (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 11, pp. 106-108)

## Book Review

### Situating Sri Aurobindo: A reader

by Larry Seidlitz

Reprinted from *Auroville Today*, January 2014

Peter Heehs has edited a collection of critical essays by various scholars on Sri Aurobindo. The book aims to put Sri Aurobindo's thought in perspective—biographically, culturally, and politically; within the corresponding intellectual disciplines; and as a living influence for the present and the future. Most of the authors do evaluate Sri Aurobindo's contributions to their respective disciplines, but for the most part these evaluations are positive, though some of the authors take issue with particular points.

I found Heehs' 'Introduction' quite interesting and helpful. He begins by introducing Sri Aurobindo, who, "known to some primarily as a revolutionary and political leader, to others as a yogi and spiritual guru, was also an outstanding poet, literary critic, political and social theorist, philosopher, and spiritual thinker." Heehs then quotes one of the authors in the volume, K.D. Verma, who says that readers of Sri Aurobindo's works "fall into two broad groups: those who are followers of Aurobindo and those who are fascinated by his extraordinary genius and achievements." Heehs notes that while the former have generated an extensive literature, the latter have published pieces on him in a variety of peer-reviewed journals and edited books. From the latter Heehs has selected fifteen out of the dozens of essays brought out in such publications since the late 1950s. Heehs goes on to nicely summarize the essential approaches and issues discussed by each of the 15 authors, putting them into the broader context of their respective fields and of Sri Aurobindo's life and work.

As might be expected in an edited book of 15 chapters from different authors in four different disciplines (Poetry and Criticism, Political and Social, Philosophical, and Spiritual) there is some unevenness. Indeed, I was ready to put down the book mid way through the first chapter by K.D. Verma, "Sri Aurobindo as a Poet," which was overflowing with scholastic jargon and meandered as through an unmapped jungle. I suppose it was selected for this first position, however, because it further explores the issues of critical analysis, particularly for someone like Sri Aurobindo, and did raise various intriguing propositions. The chapter that followed was on Savitri by Richard Hartz, who I believe is currently one of the best exponents of Sri Aurobindo's thought. Two additional chapters, one on Sri Aurobindo's theory of poetry, and one on "poetic influences" on Sri Aurobindo's spiritual and nationalist convictions rounded out section one.

The second section on political and social thought was interesting because it focuses on a relatively short period in Sri Aurobindo's life during which he radically changed from being a revolutionary to a yogi. The authors in this section explore the biographical and historical influences which may be at work in this transformation. They also raised interesting speculations about the possible development of Sri Aurobindo's thought.

I felt more satisfied with the third section on Philosophy. I particularly liked Steve Odin's chapter comparing Sri Aurobindo's and Hegel's view on involution and evolution, which helped me to better appreciate some aspects of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy while also informing me of similar views that were being advanced in the West. Some of the main points made were further delineated in Nalini Bhushan and Jay Garfield's essay which focussed on *līlāvāda*, the philosophical view that the universe is a play of the Divine, and more broadly, exists for the delight that the realization of its possibilities bring. Haridas Chaudhuri's chapter nicely laid out three primary issues in Sri Aurobindo's philosophical thought, while Stephen Phillips discussed Sri Aurobindo's views on ethics.

The final section on spiritual thought seemed to me uneven and disappointing. The first essay deals with a somewhat tangential issue of the "parable of the ten avatars" as a metaphor for spiritual evolution in the Indian tradition. While the broader issue of involution and evolution is certainly a central issue in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, it is dealt with only in summary fashion and not as the focus of the article. The next chapter discusses tantra and saktism in Sri Aurobindo's yoga, which again is interesting and central, but the author focuses on the historical development of these ideas and practices in Sri Aurobindo's life and yoga, rather than on their mature form in his teachings. Helpfully, the author makes it fairly clear that Sri Aurobindo was averse to the controversial practices with which tantrism is sometimes associated. The final chapter by Robert McDermott, a well-known Sri Aurobindo scholar, nicely wraps up the book by emphasizing several key points about Sri Aurobindo's spiritual teaching, and most importantly, that it is based on spiritual experience and is not merely an intellectual or historical construction.



## *The poetry room*

### **Musa Spiritus**

O Word concealed in the upper fire,  
Thou who hast lingered through centuries,  
Descend from thy rapt white desire,  
Plunging through gold eternities.  
Into the gulfs of our nature leap,  
Voice of the spaces, call of the Light!  
Break the seals of Matter's sleep,  
Break the trance of the unseen height.  
In the uncertain glow of human mind,  
Its waste of unharmonied thronging thoughts,  
Carve thy epic mountain-lined  
Crowded with deep prophetic grotts.  
Let thy hue-winged lyrics hover like birds  
Over the swirl of the heart's sea.  
Touch into sight with thy fire-words  
The blind indwelling deity.  
O Muse of the Silence, the wideness make  
In the unplumbed stillness that hears thy voice;  
In the vast mute heavens of the spirit awake  
Where thy eagles of Power flame and rejoice.  
Out, out with the mind and its candle flares,  
Light, light the suns that never die.  
For my ear the cry of the seraph stars  
And the forms of the Gods for my naked eye!  
Let the little troubled life-god within  
Cast his veils from the still soul,  
His tiger-stripes of virtue and sin,  
His clamour and glamour and thole and dole;  
All make tranquil, all make free.  
Let my heart-beats measure the footsteps of God  
As He comes from His timeless infinity  
To build in their rapture His burning abode.  
Weave from my life His poem of days,  
His calm pure dawns and His noons of force.  
My acts for the grooves of His chariot-race,  
My thoughts for the tramp of His great steeds' course!

—Sri Aurobindo

### **In some faint dawn**

In some faint dawn,  
In some dim eve,  
    Like a gesture of Light,  
    Like a dream of delight  
Thou com'st nearer and nearer to me.

—Sri Aurobindo

### **Symbol moon**

Once again thou hast climbed, O moon, like a white fire on the  
    glimmering edge,  
    Floating up, floating up from the haunted verge of a foam-  
    tremulous sea.  
Mystic-horned here crossing the grey-hued listless nights and days,  
    Spirit-silver craft from the ports of eternity.

Overhead with thy plunging and swaying prow thou fleetest, O  
    ship of the gods,  
    Glorifying the clouds with thy halo, but our hearts with a  
    rose-red rapture shed from the secret breasts of love;  
Almost thou seemest the very bliss that floats in opaline air  
    over heaven's golden roads,  
    Embodied here to capture our human lives like a nectar  
    face of light in the doubtful blue above.

Dumbly blithe, shuddering, the air is filled from thy cup of pale  
    mysterious wine:  
    Gleam quivers to longing gleam; and the faery torches lit for  
    Night's mysteries are set in her niches stark and deep;  
The inconscient gulfs stir and are vaguely thrilled, while their  
    unheard voices cry to the Wonder-light new-seen  
    Till descending its ray shall unlock with a wizard rod of fire  
    the dumb recesses of sleep.

Bright and alone in a white-foam-glinted delicate dim-blue  
    ocean of sky,  
    Ever thou runst and thou floatest as a magic drifting bowl  
Flung by the hand of a drunken god in the river of Time goes  
    tossing by,  
    O icon and chalice of spiritual light whose spots are like  
    Nature's shadow stains on a white and immaculate soul.

How like one frail and haunted thou com'st, O white moon, at  
    my lonely call from thy deep sky-covert heights,  
    A voyager carrying through the myriad-isled archipelago  
    of the spear-pointed questioning stars  
The circle of the occult argent Yes of the Invisible to the dim  
    query of the yearning witness lights  
    That burn in the dense vault of Matter's waking mind—  
    innumerable, solitary and sparse.

A disk of a greater Ray that shall come, a white-fire rapture and  
    girdling rose of love,  
    Timelessly thou driftest, O soundless silver boat that set  
    out from the far Unknown,  
Moon-crystal of silver or gold of some spirit joy spun by Time  
    in his dense aeonic groove,  
    A messenger and bearer of an unembodied beauty and  
    unseized bliss advancing over our life's wan sea—  
    significant, bright and alone.

—Sri Aurobindo





## Moon of two hemispheres

A gold moon-raft floats and swings slowly  
And it casts a fire of pale holy blue light  
On the dragon tail aglow of the faint night  
                                    That glimmers far,—swimming,  
The illumined shoals of stars skimming,  
Overspreading earth and drowning the heart in sight  
With the ocean depths and breadths of the Infinite.  
A gold moon-ship sails or drifts ever  
In our spirit's skies and halts never, blue-keeled,  
And it throws its white-blue fire on this grey field,  
                                    Night's dragon loop,—speeding,  
The illumined star-thought sloops leading  
To the Dawn, their harbour home, to the Light unsealed,  
To the sun-face Infinite, the Untimed revealed.

—Sri Aurobindo

## The eternal ecstasy<sup>1</sup>

You are the comfort of my soul  
In the season of sorrow.  
You are the wealth of my spirit  
In the heartbreak of loss.  
The unimaginable, the unknowable  
That is what you give my soul  
When it moves in your direction.  
By your grace my eyes have looked upon Eternity.  
O Beloved, how could this crumbling empire ever take me from you?  
The voice that sings your name  
Is sweeter than midnight sleep  
More graceful than the song of a royal poet.  
When deep in prayer my faith is bound by the thought of you,  
Not the seven verses of faith.  
If I were offered a kingdom, and the earth's riches were placed at my feet,  
I would bow with my face low and say,  
This does not compare to Your Love!  
Union is the pure wine. My life is the cup.  
Without your wine what use is this cup?  
I once had a thousand desires  
But in my one desire to know you all else melted away.  
The pure essence of your being has taken over my heart and soul.  
Through your grace I have found a treasure within myself.  
I have found the truth of the Unseen world.  
I have come upon the eternal ecstasy.  
I have gone beyond the ravages of time.  
I have become one with you!  
Now my heart sings, "I am the soul of the world."  
From my first breath I have longed for You.  
This longing has become my life.  
This longing has seen me grow old...  
But one mention of you, Beloved, and all my youth comes back to me.

—Rumi

## Long distance elevator New Year's 2014

*"Mama never forgets her birds" —Emily Dickinson*

Late at night on the elevator of this apartment building,  
push buttons lighting up—  
so the riders know the floor—  
pass into the names of planets, moons, asteroids, rings.  
We glance at the gleaming dials,  
and as The Thing closes  
barely missing someone's feet,  
sometimes we glimpse  
the star charts superimposed  
on the pulsing veins of the door.

For a split second, not even that,  
we have no space problems,  
no rent,  
absolutely nothing.  
We have no neighbors: neighbors are Ears.  
No one must hear the songs we sing.  
Yet any door can open  
and anyone can step  
into Long Distance Elevator:  
light years  
between stops.

So on we go, and never know what hits us  
when someone, getting off, goes  
Stepping Out Into The Silence.

The elevator is home  
and we're only out for short visits  
to the apartments that keep us.  
We are the victims of sanctuary,  
which we furnish more or less  
with the chips of our selves  
whom we can't afford to own,  
not even,  
not ever,  
or pay to release.  
Nor cover the rent very much longer.

Here, with pad of feet on ratty rug  
we enter.  
Cell in hand, we whisper,  
all at one  
with the same  
quiet enthusiasm  
and the passion with which  
we are curious to denounce each other.

1 Edited by Enea, retrieved from [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FgFvcL8ppk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FgFvcL8ppk)



I wouldn't be you even if you *were* me.  
And even if I were you  
I would not do as you do.  
Let the phones ring  
in their holsters,  
there aren't any answers.  
Turn off the lamps in the living rooms,  
shred the age old papers.  
Let it snow, let it snow,  
let pixels drizzle in the air until they disappear,  
let it all go, leaping, whirling  
with total abandon, into thin air.

*Up on the top floor  
when we've left the building  
and nothing is there but All That Is,  
—all that lives... There is moving—  
unendurable bliss, blissfully endured.  
None but loving cares.  
For every human being there's  
a strand of hum blest harmony.  
All smoothly crosses, all go  
a vast of silence without friction.  
Here our wills have strength.  
They do not carry us nor pull.  
They let us slide upon  
the strings to each new station.  
So leave the line below to be.  
Our bad was something else,  
something excellent.*

The rooms are neutral and carbon free.  
Let them be.  
Move it on down, Underground.  
Sky, *toe the line*.  
Love Shiloh and little Shelby, cherish their smiles but keep  
their Limburger cheese off the glowing dials.  
Bring Auntie and Uncle, too, down the Arctic hall,  
making all the noise we can:  
To the elevator, still abuilding.  
It will hold us all equally cool.  
Its tiny floor space will surely expand,  
till the space between our feet  
is equal to the space between the floors.

There may be a loud sharp crack  
as the Skull Of All Of It splits  
and we all lose our mind—  
and nobody misses it.  
Then, the space between our cells,  
like the sands at Seaside...that  
might as well be infinite.

Mass exodus  
for all who merely hover,  
hollow to the shoulder,  
in these huddled structures:  
the soft skyscraper screams  
far below as we are taken  
up.

We live for that moment  
of true Emptiness accelerated  
when we look out the window  
and all we see is glass.  
What we are is on all sides of us,  
we were standing in the middle of it all the time.  
The abyss is all around us  
and we're riding on What We Are.

—Rick Lipschutz  
written with Amanda Emerson

## Mystery<sup>2</sup>

Today the sun is playing  
with wind and sea

Not far from Nirvana cafes and Zen tables  
I probe these City Lights books in San Francisco  
as I used to browse book stalls  
in Boston and New York

I was preoccupied in those days  
with metaphysical muses  
and the mystery

What is life? the traveler treads the path  
over miles of a lifetime--play of shakti weaving  
a way through the maze of change  
in the maya

We go through life oblivious of  
the mystery of our being,

creatures of this surface world  
thrilling in outer magic

as in wild times  
of young dream  
and vital adventure

And even if blessed with love,  
our path weaves on, arduous  
journey in solitary turns

2 In Joseph Kent, *Streams*, San Francisco: Sunlight Publishers,  
1996.



for great distances forever  
along the stream of time  
where eternal lamps beacon  
over reflecting waters  
and geography of real dream

in passage through days and nights  
of coping over the stones  
and winding spans of atmosphere  
in the stretch of hazards, joys, delight,

bad weather, and blizzards of grief  
or sunlit hours in soft strains,  
till by impulsions of inward sense and urge,  
auguries of psychic change and bliss

in this life or others,  
the journeyer travels the way  
to invisible pointers

leading under the rapture of the vast  
toward the horizon of the soul  
and the mystery

—Joseph Kent

### **The living God<sup>3</sup>**

He who is in you and outside you,  
Who works through all hands,  
Who walks on all feet,  
Whose body are all ye,  
Him worship, and break all other idols!

He who is at once the high and low,  
The sinner and the saint,  
Both God and worm,  
Him worship—visible, knowable, real, omnipresent,  
Break all others idols!

In whom is neighter past life  
Nor future birth nor death,  
In whom we always have been  
And always shall be one,  
Him worship, Break all other idols!

Ye fools! who neglect the living God,  
And His infinite reflections with which the world is full.  
While ye run aftr imaginary shadows,  
That lead alone to fights and quarrels,  
Him worship, the only visible!  
Break all other idols!

—Vivekananda

### **From Towards democracy<sup>3</sup>**

Standing beyond Time,  
As the Earth to the bodies of all men gives footing and free  
passage, yet draws them to itself with final overmastering  
force, and is their bodies—  
So I their souls.

I am the ground of thy soul;  
And I am that which draws thee unbeknown—veiled Eros,  
Visitor of thy long night-time;  
And I that give thee form from ancient ages,  
Thine own—yet in due time to return to Me  
Standing beyond Time.

O gracious Mother, in thy vast eternal sunlight  
Heal us, thy foolish children, from our sins;  
Who heed thee not, but careless of thy Presence  
Turn our bent backs on thee, and scratch and scrabble  
In ash-heaps for salvation.

—Edward Carpenter

### **Unbounded**

Tease me not thus, O transient Time,  
Rob me not thus, O confining Space,  
For the span of one tiny life.  
Too many are Her attractions  
And Her marvels are too great.  
O pray, stay back the sun,  
For I am not yet done  
With the enchantment of Her eyes.  
O encircle for a little while  
The mysterious shape of night;  
Behind the facade of dawn  
Let not the shy moon hide.  
For I have not yet raised  
The beguiling veil off Her face.  
Duped by my fleeting days  
And the insufficiencies of fugitive nights  
My unfulfilled yearnings strain  
Against earth's bounded space and time.  
O weave eternities in my moments,  
My bounded steps with infinities impale.  
No more the fluttering moth-wings,  
No more this tragic change of robe.  
Let me nestle at last in Her beauty's eyrie, —  
A golden eaglet of the mighty gods  
To dare the heavens on wings of flame.

—Shyam Kumari

3 In Alan Jacobs (Ed.), *Poetry for the Spirit*, London: Watkins  
Publishing, 2002.





## *Apropos*

To call to the Mother always is the main thing and with that to aspire and assent to the Light when it comes, to reject and detach oneself from desire and any dark movement. But if one cannot do these other things successfully, then call and still call. —Sri Aurobindo

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. —The Mother

God doesn't look at how much we do, but with how much love we do it. —Mother Teresa

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

He who is filled with love is filled with God himself. —Saint Augustine

If you judge people, you have no time to love them. —Mother Teresa

And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make. — The Beatles

Pray that your loneliness may spur you into finding something to live for, great enough to die for. —Dag Hammarskjöld

Difficulties are meant to rouse, not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong by conflict. —William Ellery Channing

All our dreams can come true—if we have the courage to pursue them. —Walt Disney

By living fully, recognizing that all we do is by His power, we honor God; He in turn blesses us. —Becky Laird

For God Himself works in our souls, in the deepest depths, taking increasing control as we are progressively willing to be prepared for His wonder. —Thomas R. Kelly

God's heart is the most sensitive and tender of all. No act goes unnoticed, no matter how insignificant or small. —Richard J. Foster

In the universe, there are things that are known, and things that are unknown, and in between, there are doors. —William Blake

Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere. —Albert Einstein

Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do. —John Wooden

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us. —Henry Stanley Haskins

It is never too late to be what you might have been. —George Eliot

If you cannot do great things, do small things in a great way. —Napoleon Hill

Every calling is great when greatly pursued. —Oliver Wendell Holmes

Failure is the condiment that gives success its flavor. —Truman Capote

Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things. —Peter Drucker

If you smile at me I will understand, cause that is something everybody everywhere does in the same language. Crosby, Stills and Nash

I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it. —Pablo Picasso

Fear is the lock and laughter the key to your heart. —Crosby, Stills and Nash

Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are. —John Wooden

The elevator to success is out of order. You'll have to use the stairs . . . one step at a time. —Joe Girard

If we treat people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming. —Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision. —Helen Keller

To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing. —Fred Shero

A mind is like a parachute. It doesn't work if it isn't open. —Frank Zappa

Thinking is the best way to travel. —The Moody Blues

Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted. —William Bruce Cameron

Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within reach of every hand. —Mother Teresa

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it. —Edith Wharton

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before beginning to improve the world. —Anne Frank

For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love. —Carl Sagan

Every moment is a fresh beginning. —T.S. Eliot

My true religion is Kindness. —Dalai Lama