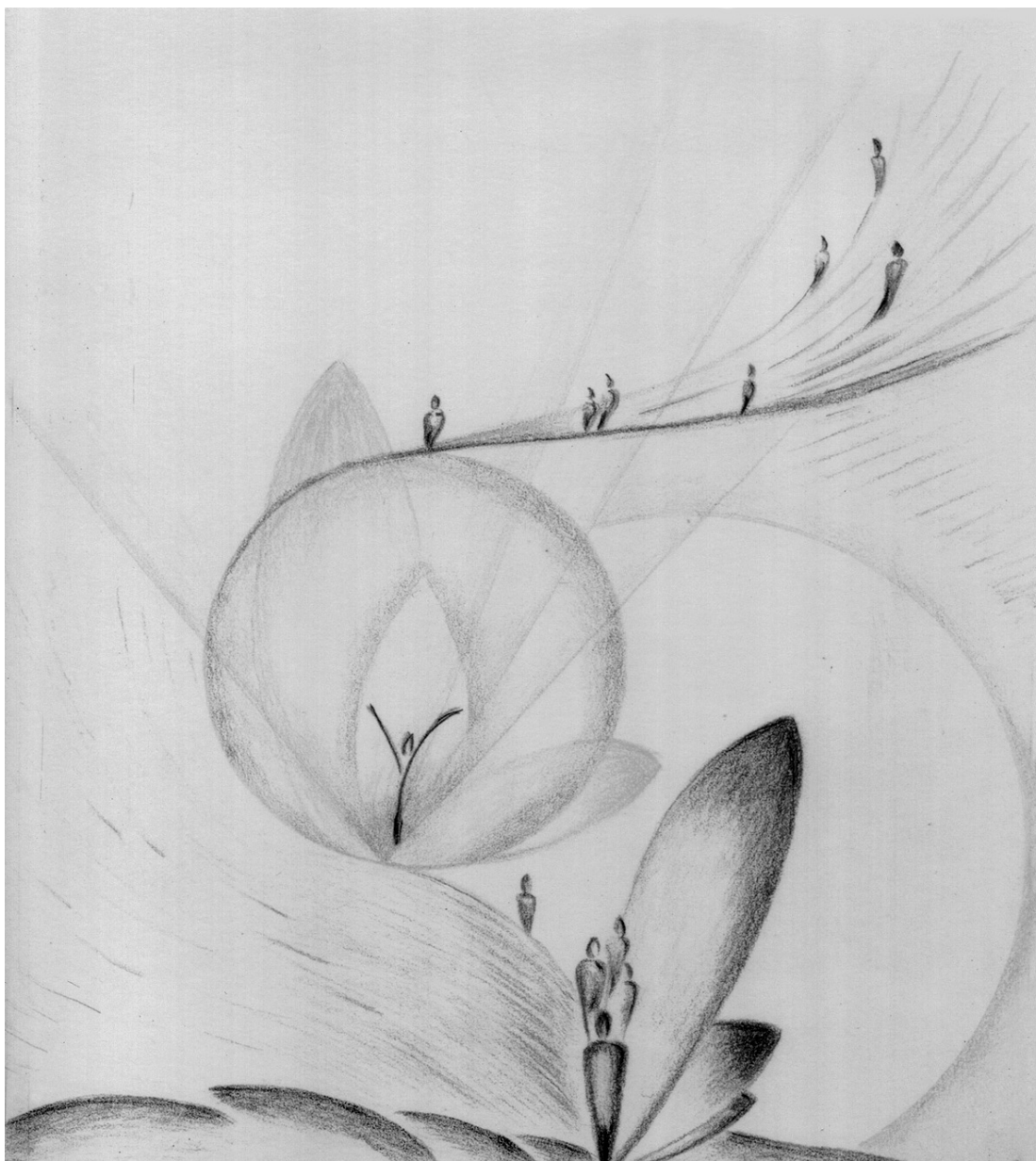


Collaboration

Summer & Fall 2014

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 39, Nos. 1-2



Amidhar's story, part 2 by Shyam Kumari •

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

The composition of *Savitri*, part 1 by Richard Hartz •

The role of the body in the Integral Yoga, part 1 by Martha Orton •

Researching the practice of Integral Yoga in life and work by Larry Seidlitz •

Organizational creativity and The Desert Flower by Pravir Malik •

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About the cover

Title: Beyond the Sun Path. 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 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.

The authors and poets

Minnie Canteenwalla was a frequent visitor to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where she received Sri Aurobindo's encouragement and guidance in writing poetry.

Georgette Cody was a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram who was a poet and essayist.

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Richard Hartz (richardahartz@hotmail.com) is a member of the Ashram where he works in the Archives and is a scholar on Sri Aurobindo's thought.

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Kamalakanto was a Bengali poet who joined the Ashram in 1949; he published two books of poetry and contributed poems to journals in India and abroad.

Joseph Kent is associated with the Cultural Integral Fellowship in San Francisco. His poetry has been published in three books and various journals.

Shyam Kumari (shyamkumari@auromail.net) is a long-time member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the author of many books and a Hindi journal.

Julian Lines (julianlines@gmail.com) is president of the Matagiri Board of Trustees and a member of Auroville's International Advisory Council.

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Pravir Malik (pravirmalik@aurosoorya.com) is an Organizational Development and Change Management leader and consultant and an author.

Prithwi Singh Nahar (1898-1976), was a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where his eight children also eventually settled.

Nirodbaran was a physician in the Ashram who became Sri Aurobindo's attendant and scribe. He also blossomed as a poet under Sri Aurobindo's guidance.

Anie Nunnally (aniemere@gmail.com) resides and works at the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles.

Martha Orton (martha.orton@gmail.com), a therapist in Virginia, is an author and facilitator of online courses on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

Larry Seidlitz (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is the author of *Transforming Lives*, editor of *Collaboration*, and a researcher and online instructor of the Integral Yoga.

Karan Singh, an Indian statesman, is chairman of the Auroville Foundation, the Indian Government body that is overseeing Auroville's development.

Carel Thieme (carel@auroville.org.in) is a Dutch Aurovilian and is the publisher of *Auroville Today*.

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From the office of Collaboration

In this double issue, our featured Chronicle is the second part of 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 after taking up the Integral Yoga. The story recounts Amidhar's remarkable darshans with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, with Ramana Maharshi, his visits to the Ashram, and his various spiritual and occult experiences.

This story is followed by our first Essay, the second installment of John Robert Cornell's previously unpublished book 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 second installment, John Robert and Karen explore the remote wildernesses of the Southwest. We get a feel for these ancient lands and their landscapes, their hidden treasures, and for the Spirit which they embody.

This is followed by the first of a two-part Essay, "The composition of *Savitri*," by Richard Hartz. This work was previously published in *Mother India* in 50 installments beginning in October 1999. In the first part of the series, reproduced here, Richard provides an overview of Sri Aurobindo's writing of *Savitri* from its beginning in 1916 to its final revisions in 1950, with special attention on Books 1 and 2 of the epic. Part 2, to be published in the next issue, will be based on selections from the *Mother India* series that specifically address the composition of Books 3-11. Richard's painstaking analysis of the successive drafts of *Savitri* for his work at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives is utilized in this work to give us a deeper appreciation of Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece.

These are followed by Essays by Martha Orton on the role of the body in the Integral Yoga, and by Larry Seidlitz on researching the practice of Integral Yoga in life and work. Martha's essay focuses on the importance of transforming the body, its resistances, and the way to do it. Larry discusses the basic methods and preliminary findings of his ongoing research study. Next, we have two short essays by Pravir Malik from his blog. The first examines his model for understanding organizational creativity, and the second tells the story of a young girl who escapes abuse and hardship to become a successful model, which is used to show how we can transform our own obstacles into opportunities.

We open this issue with Current Affairs, which begins with Anie Nunnally's remembrance of June Maher, who passed away on 25 April. June was a beloved member of the Sri Aurobindo community, whose dedicated work for Auroville and the Divine will always be remembered. This is followed by news from the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center and Matagiri. In AV Almanac we present articles on a new initiative for raising funds for securing the land in the center of Auroville, and on efforts to secure the water supply in Auroville. In Source Material we have excerpts from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the necessary attitudes needed in our work. We also have 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.

Margaret Phanes, a graphic artist, resides in Lodi, California where she is associated with the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, and is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Association, which is the publisher of Collaboration.

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About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current members: Lynda Lester, president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Angelo Salerno, treasurer; Margaret Phanes, director.

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Current Affairs

Remembering June Maher

by Anie Nunnally

When I remember June Maher her very name conjures up thoughts and memories of her strengths, courage, compassion, loyalty, dedication, reliability, her humor and laughter, her *joie de vivre*—but most of all a heart full of love.

I am extremely grateful for the years that I have shared with June. I am grateful for her work for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for Auroville and the Foundation for World Education (FWE); the sincerity of her inner journey on the path of the Integral Yoga; her love for Al, her beautiful husband and soul mate, and her children, Carolyn, Grant, Warren and Norman, and her grandchildren, who all loved her so dearly. This includes all of her admiring friends as well.

June was “Mother Auroville.” I cannot begin to imagine how many Aurovilians stepped through her portals in Aptos, California seeking comfort and rest from their long and weary journeys from India. She fed them, housed them and embraced them all as though they were her own children.

June never discussed people in a negative manner. She focused on the good in everyone. She truly lived by the aphorism of the Mother, “The least said about others, even if it be in praise of them, the better.” She held always to a positive attitude and avoided spreading negative energies about her condition. She was always working diligently and aspiring with intention that the body would come around and that she would toss away her walker forever. In this regard she must have done some intense inner work in her last days.

I first met June in the late 1970’s at my New York City apartment on West 57th Street. We immediately forged a strong friendship as our backgrounds were similar—both being Southern ladies. She grew up in Virginia (though she was born in Hawaii) as the daughter of a Navy Admiral, and I hailed from Mississippi. However, the deeper connection came through our shared experience of having had darshan of the Mother and to our dedication to Auroville, the Foundation for World Education work, the “Planned Giving Program” for the FWE and AVI-USA for raising funds for Auroville.

After that first meeting June would often visit me in New York City and again when I moved to Woodstock, NY and ultimately to California where she would visit as often as she could on her birthday on January 15th. She would come to my home in Culver City, then to Marina del Rey and later joined us at the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles when I moved to that center. We would always celebrate her birthdays with great festivity and joy.

June never turned down an opportunity to visit and when



I organized two fundraisers for Auroville Land in the early 2000s she was on a plane and down here to Los Angeles in an instant to help me out. First for the Silent Auction at Bravo Restaurant in Santa Monica for the Land Fund for Auroville, and then a couple of years after that it was “Art for Land,” again a dinner party and art sale at Bravo Restaurant, when Guy Ryckaert and Ila Zadrozny came with art pieces from Auroville which we sold for the Land Fund purchase.

Whenever there was a chance to do something for Auroville, June was there if at all possible.

June’s work began for Auroville through a meeting with Dietra (Claire Worden) who lived in Santa Cruz. Claire eventually moved to Auroville with her children around 1969. On a visit to Santa Cruz in 1971 she organized a group of people who later became the Auroville Association. After Claire returned to Auroville, June was charged with the development of this group which started as a study group in her home. June eventually went to India in 1971 and met the Mother. She inquired of her as to how to develop the organization. Mother told her “No recruiting, but money may be obtained.” So a Non-Profit organization was established, still out of June’s home initially, and later on other people became the administrators and secretaries, and the office floated in their various homes. Events for Auroville for the first time in America were held in Mt. Madonna in the 1990s, again at Merriam Hill Center in 1995, there was an all Auroville meeting. Julian Lines opened an Auroville Information Office in Woodstock, NY and today there are Auroville Internationals all over the world. Much of this expansion and success can be attributed to June’s organizational skills and persistence in the early days, her meetings with important people and fund-raising.

When June joined the FWE as a board member I was still serving on that board. Having her on the board where she exercised her wisdom and fairness with every decision made was a blessing to behold. It was an honor to be with her and to work on the AVI-USA/FWE Planned Giving fund that was established through the FWE at that time. When I stepped down from the board we still continued to visit each other’s homes.

When her health declined after heart surgery in 2005 I was certain that she would rally. She had grit and a strong will. She was not willing to give in. She called me in April just a week before she passed and we had a long conversation about the wonderful times we had together socially and through our work.



At the end I told her that I missed seeing her and being together for visits. Her final words to me were “We will always be connected.” Those words ring in my ears with great comfort. June always talked about the “Golden Ship” and somehow I feel that Ship was waiting for her as she left a lifetime of service and onto another realm of the Inner Journey. She will be greatly missed by many around the world but she has left behind a noble legacy.

The Sri Aurobindo Learning Center

by Rod Hemsell

Our calendar of summer activities seems to be filling up faster and promising more this season than ever before. Already, garden planting and green house reconstruction have kept the core group busy and the fairies and devas are singing. But we have more to look forward to than a green harvest, especially in the context of our mission as an educational foundation to offer programs of study in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In July we will have a series of Sunday lectures by Rod on the philosophy of religion, based on his course recently completed in Auroville. These will be held from 10-12 in the morning, and then in August he will offer a six-day intensive Savitri Immersion workshop from the 11th to the 16th. This is an annual event and generally includes a wide variety of participatory and therapeutic activities. For registration information please call Brian at 719-256-6010, and for information see www.sriaurobindolc.org.

Another resident of Auroville who is from our area, Tia Pleiman from Salida, will offer an Art Therapy Retreat from August 1st to 3rd, including residential accommodations. To find out more please go to www.createandtransform.org. Both Tia and Rod will also be presenters at the AUM conference which is being held at Auromesa, in Taos, NM, this year from August 8th to 10th. This is an annual conference of members of the Sri Aurobindo community from across the US, which is sponsored by a different group or center in a different location each year, and usually includes visitors from the Auroville community who present their on-going work. This year one of the main presenters is Aviram who originally came to Auroville from Israel and has created a student exchange program that brings a few hundred students each year, from many different countries, to participate in a large reforestation project in S. India, and to learn about Auroville. For more information on this conference please go to www.collaboration.org/aum/2014.

In addition to these special programs and activities, we have remodeled Savitri House and made the center library available to the community. Visitors are now welcome to come in and read the books, and also to meditate in the Savitri Solar Dome. We have regular Tuesday evening readings and a potluck dinner from 6-9 p.m. to which all students of the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo are welcome. Our retreat and guest facilities are also available to any



A gathering of devotees in the meditation dome at the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Learning Center)

spiritual groups or organizations, seasonally, and may be scheduled in advance by calling 719-256-4917.

Matagiri events

by Julian Lines

Matagiri has had a series of interesting visitors including Auroville pioneer, Robert Lawlor, who spoke about his early years with Deborah in Forecomers. Many interesting experiments in stabilized earth, growing algae as a dietary supplement and combining local materials with Western architectural concepts have evolved and adapted throughout Auroville and India from their early prototypes in the late sixties.

We also enjoyed the return of J.V. Avadhanulu from Auroville who taught his pranayama class in Woodstock and again for the NY Study Circle. His distillation of techniques and clear teaching style was appreciated in both venues.

In July, Professor Stephen Phillips from the University of Texas in Austin gave a weekend retreat based on Indian sacred texts serving as a primer in philosophy and chant for those involved in yoga practice. Steve studied with Arabinda Basu, one of the esteemed philosophers associated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and with Robert Nozick at Harvard.

On August 15th, Nirankar Agarwal from the Delhi Branch of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram visited Matagiri and gave a talk about Sri Aurobindo and the history of the Delhi Ashram. He subsequently gave a series of workshop on the Bates method as taught at the School of Perfect Eyesight at the Ashram in Pondicherry which has conducted a number of eye camps in Nainital.

Information about events at Matagiri are regularly posted on their website (<http://matagiri.org>) and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/MatagiriCenter>). Matagiri is located in the Catskill Mountains at 1218 Wittenberg Road, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457. Please call in advance before visiting: +1 845-679-8322.



AV almanac

Acres for Auroville— a fund-raising campaign

by Mandakini Lucien-Brun

Reprinted from *Auroville Today*, June-July 2014

The goal of Acres for Auroville is to secure, consolidate, and protect the land in the Matrimandir and International Zone areas. The campaign is a joint effort of Auroville International France with Lands for Auroville Unified (LFAU) in coordination with the LCC (Land Coordination Committee). Its core team members—Mandakini, Francine and Nadia from AVI France, and Aryadeep and Sigrid from LFAU—have prepared Acres for Auroville as their offering of love and loyalty for Auroville and the Mother, and as a united, collective gift for Auroville's 50th birthday in 2018.

"Auroville is a gift of the Divine to the world," says Friederike, Chairperson of Auroville International. "On February 28, 2018, the City of Dawn will celebrate its 50th anniversary. AVI France, in cooperation with LFAU, has started this great campaign to give back a gift to the Divine—the full protection and consolidation of Auroville's heart and centre.

In recent months, private developments in the planned Auroville Township area, such as the creation of Auropark [see *Auroville Today*, September 2013], have called attention to the urgent need to secure and consolidate the land in Auroville's city area. Dr. Karan Singh's letter and the Auroville Foundation's call to drastically accelerate the land securing process, the results of the Land Status Study Group (LSSG) with their conclusion that land acquisition must become a top priority, and the encroachments on International Zone land near the site of the future Language Laboratory and the Unity Pavilion, all serve to highlight the need for a fresh momentum and creative solution to tackle the task.

"The land in Auroville's centre is in danger," says Mandakini, a Friend of Auroville who first came to the City of Dawn in 1980, and who also launched last year's successful fundraiser for Arogya, Auroville's new Institute for Integral Health. "Like many people, I thought we still had all the time in the world to finish consolidating. Then I saw Carel's article in *Auroville Today* with the photos of Auropark, and I woke up! I decided to do everything in my power to prevent future Auroparks in the Matrimandir area before it's too late. We must secure the land before outside developers act first. If not, it will be lost to Auroville forever. And the Mother explicitly said the consecrated area of the Matrimandir must be protected. How can we consider ourselves faithful to the Mother and her City of Dawn, and allow this danger to continue?"

Aryadeep, chief coordinator of LFAU has been a devoted activist for and exponent of Auroville's territorial integrity since his first publication in 1994. "The land base is essential for Auroville to manifest her full possibilities," he says, "and for her to develop cohesively and harmoniously." And he adds that the Mother made a direct and pointed appeal for Auroville's land "of a kind she didn't make for any other work or creation she undertook, including the Matrimandir on which She laid unique stress by calling it the 'soul of Auroville'."

"We're not on a deserted plateau anymore," says Sigrid, who is a committed land activist. "Pondicherry is exploding and the same multi-story apartment blocks I saw near the Chennai airport are now shooting up all around Pondy, and all in this past year! The risk for Auroville is that it becomes just a little oasis within Pondicherry city. How soon and how much of an oasis, even as a centre of integral yoga, depends on us!

"We needed a professional website to be an effective and dynamic information channel. After questioning for so many years why there was so little input into fundraising for land purchase, I decided to finally sit with Aryadeep, find people, and give it a start." Together, Aryadeep and Sigrid developed the Collaboration for Auroville Area Protection (COLAAP) website, with initial IT support from Sathish. (www.colaap.org)

Securing and consolidating Auroville's material base is a complex task. Land is needed in the center, in all the Crown Road area, in the outer circle, and in the Green Belt. Land prices are now astronomical compared to those in 1997. Despite the price, land purchase is the surest and simplest way to meet the urgent need. Land exchange is another crucial strategy, one which many Aurovilians support and certain landowners prefer. For some Aurovilians, selling outlying lands is the only solution, while this approach is hotly contested by others.

"The mission of the Land Task Force for securing all Master Plan land is critical," says Mandakini. "But, until their job is completed, the land is in danger. One thing we can do right now is to acquire more acres before they are permanently lost to Auroville. About 10 percent of the Matrimandir and International Zone areas are still needed to achieve their consolidation and protection. Our objective is to do just that by fundraising for the urgently needed donations."

The Acres for Auroville land fundraiser aims at realizing these objectives:

- (1) Acquiring the maximum number of plots of land in the area around the Matrimandir and in or around the International Zone to protect and finally consolidate them.
- (2) Raising awareness of the urgent need for everyone to act in defense of Auroville's territorial integrity.
- (3) Creating a sense of unity, enthusiasm, and determination to reach these goals which support our collective aspiration and purpose.

As a consecrated offering, Acres for Auroville will fundraise most intensively in the months of August, November, February, and April—the four months with spiritually-significant anniver-



sary dates in the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. “Acres for Auroville unites three powerful symbols—the Mother’s Symbol, the Earth, and the anniversary dates,” says Francine, a longtime member of AVI’s International Board. “May the force of these symbols eradicate all the resistances, so we can complete the puzzle of Auroville land!”

Acres for Auroville continues a tradition of dynamic action by committed Aurovilians and members of Auroville International. There was Paul’s highly successful “Million Dollar Campaign” in collaboration with Aryadeep, Guy, and all the AVI centers. And there was Guy’s impassioned “House on Fire!” appeal to Aurovilians some years ago. “The physical integrity of Auroville is at risk,” he said then. “The future manifestation of the Auroville Township, as envisaged by the Mother, is under threat. Therefore, the first necessity for us is to be together and join hands to take up this major challenge in front of us. This is not the responsibility of a few working groups or a small team of people. This is the responsibility of all of us, of each member of the community!”

In fact, for Sigrid “every Aurovilian and friend of Auroville is a potential fundraiser! There is also a global family out there, people who do care about Auroville, who are connected to it and its vision. Each person, can contribute, not only financially, but by communicating—by informing all their friends and their network of contacts. Every effort, big or small, counts! As a homeopath, I look for the little input that creates the biggest effect.”

“This is the opportunity for a collective action that people scattered all over the world can unite on. Through it, they can stay connected to Auroville, the Mother, and Sri Aurobindo,” says Francine. “It’s another diaspora, and another Promised Land!” Nadia adds: “So many people have been waiting for the moment when they can do something concrete to protect Auroville’s center. Acres for Auroville is the opportunity, something we can all unite around.” And for Mandakini, “I have been moved by a deep and continuous inner feeling that the time to act is now. Previous campaigns have shown us that when we unite our aspiration, and our determination and energy in the right spirit, then the Help comes.”

The formal kick-off for the campaign is August 15th. Donations can be made on the anniversary dates or at any time, starting now, to the campaign’s account number (240001) or via the new dedicated button on the Auroville Donation Gateway. All donations will be held in trust for the exclusive acquisition of plots in the Matrimandir area and in or around the International Zone. Confidential access codes will permit donors to monitor our collective success and track the use of their donations. The campaign’s Success Barometer—in the form of the Mother’s Symbol—will be posted on COLAAP to show our progress.

Donors will receive an “Acres for Auroville Land Contribution Certificate”, designed by Auroville artist Emanuele. “This is my offering to the Mother for the campaign”, he says. “Auroville’s land consolidation is like a jigsaw puzzle, with lots of pieces that are still missing. Each person who contributes to the campaign brings a needed piece.” Donors will also receive a packet of Auroville earth, a much appreciated gift sent in previous land fundraising campaigns.

Please join us when the Acres for Auroville campaign kicks off on August 15th.

Auroville needs everyone’s heartfelt energy, determination, and support!

Dr. Karan Singh worried about slow pace of land acquisition

Reprinted from Auroville Today, June-July 2014

The chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, Dr. Karan Singh, in an open letter to the Aurovilians, communicated the Board’s concern about the slow progress of land purchase

New Delhi, December 5, 2013

Dear Aurovilians,

I had occasion to review the progress of land consolidation with the Auroville Working Groups dealing with the issue of land on 8th November, 2013. I was dismayed to learn that since 1st April, 2013, Auroville has managed to secure only about five acres of land. The progress in land consolidation has been very slow for many years now.

The Board finds the progress highly unsatisfactory. The City envisaged by the Mother is under serious threat from speculative developers buying large tracts of land in the neighbourhood. Land prices have risen exponentially, making it difficult for Auroville to raise the resources required to purchase all the remaining lands in the City and the Green Belt. While the Government of India has been increasing financial support to Auroville through Plan Grants, we cannot expect funds from the Government of India to purchase lands. In the present situation, Auroville has no option but to raise resources through sale/lease of lands outside the Master Plan Area. It is incomprehensible to me and my colleagues in the Board as to why the possessive attitude of a few residents refusing to move from their present location should block all progress in land consolidation. Residents need to remind themselves that they have been chosen especially for building the City that the Mother wanted, “with no private property.” It is also clearly not acceptable that even preliminary talks with the Mailam Swamy who owns a large tract of land in the Green Belt are being blocked. The Governing Board has, therefore, authorised the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation to have exploratory talks with the Swamy.

I call upon all residents to understand the seriousness of the issue and close ranks in a sincere effort to secure lands in the city area by 31st March, 2015. We also need to evolve a clear strategy for protecting the Green Belt through acquisition/exchange of critical lands to control access.

Yours sincerely,

Karan Singh



Tackling the drought

by Carel Thieme

Reprinted from *Auroville Today*, June-July 2014

Kodaimazhai, says the Tamil lady. “That’s the name we give to those rare showers that suddenly pour down in the midst of the hot season. When I was young, they were normal. But in the past decades they have almost disappeared.” Almost indeed. But in May, we saw a comeback. For four consecutive days, intense rains brought a welcome freshener in a season otherwise known for its excessively hot temperatures, which sometimes exceed 41 Centigrade.

But the showers, though much welcomed, were a mere wetting of the earth. Auroville’s water situation, warns L’Avenir d’Auroville, Auroville’s town development authority, is in dire straits. Many wells are showing less output than before; some are drying up; others need deepening. After two years of drought and countless years of over-extraction of the aquifers, the consequences are showing.

In fact, water levels are dropping all over Tamil Nadu. A recent article in *The Times of India* stated that water tables across the state have fallen by 0.5 to 2.3 metres since March 2013. Throughout the rest of the country, aquifers are dropping as well. North India’s groundwater levels are declining at one of the fastest rates in the world. In 2012, the World Bank released a report that stated that if current trends continue, about 60 percent of all of India’s aquifers will be in a critical condition.

There is little that can be done about it, but whatever can be done, should be done. L’Avenir asks Aurovilians to avoid over-watering their gardens, close the tap while washing dishes or brushing teeth, flush toilets less often and repair leaking taps and pipes. Auroville’s average water usage exceeds the Indian standard of 90-120 litres per person a day by at least 300 percent; suspicions are that the excess water is used for excessive irrigation of gardens or disappears into the ground due to leaking distribution pipes.

L’Avenir appointed Tom to take up the task of coordinating all efforts in the water sector. Tom has been involved with water from 1982 when he first set foot in Auroville. In 1989, at the request of Chief Architect Roger Anger, he made the first Auroville Water Master Plan. He recently returned to Auroville after a six-year’s absence working as Director of Operations of a logistics company in oil fields all over Africa. “I have been active in Sudan, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Chad. It was a great experience, even though it was exhausting at the physical and vital levels. But it was necessary for me. I needed to recover from Auroville, as I had been going through a difficult time when I left.”

Coming back, he didn’t see much of a change, he says, except for the fact that the work he had started had not been continued. “I was asked to once again look into Water Harvest, the company I had set-up many years ago. But I encountered a ghost of what

it was, drained of its strength, knowledge and equipment. There may have been reasons for this, but, nevertheless, it was painful.” Most importantly, the work of monitoring the ground water levels, which had been started by the Auroville Greenwork Resource Centre in 1994 and which Water Harvest had continued, had stopped. From October 2007 onwards, there are no longer any data about the performance of Auroville’s wells.

“It has become impossible to say anything precise about Auroville’s general water situation,” he says. “Auroville presents a scattered picture, with over 120 wells operating at different depths. Lacking up-to-date data and given the complexity of the issue, you can’t make absolute statements. But the indications are that the water levels have gone down. And if that is correct, it is very serious. For it will affect the future of Auroville. We have rapidly to come up with large scale solutions, for our survival is at stake.”

Luca, who for the last 20 years has been working in the water field, agrees. “The water yield of Auroville’s bore wells has diminished; and there are fears that the wells located near the sea will turn saline. Borewell monitoring is a necessity; but I do not expect that they will tell us anything different from what we know already: that the aquifers underneath Auroville are holding less water than before. With the population surrounding Auroville on the increase, and drawing on water from the same aquifers, Auroville’s situation cannot be expected to improve, not even if we have a few very good monsoons. Auroville will have to find solutions for her water needs and take action as soon as possible.”

A multi-sourcing approach

Tom and Luca propose a multi-sourcing approach. Pointing at the success of Auroville’s rainwater harvesting which has resulted in ‘zero-runoff’ through the building of bunds and dams, they propose compulsory rainwater harvesting and wastewater treatment systems in all Auroville settlements. They also support building a desalination plant to provide drinking water for Auroville and some of the nearby villages. Relying on one source, they feel, is unrealistic and dangerous. “Rainwater harvesting depends on the availability of rainwater. If there is a long period of drought, you will have problems, and all your investments will be useless. Desalination is a costly but reliable source which is always available,” says Luca. He points out that harvested rain water is suitable for public ponds, the Matrimandir Lake, and for agriculture and gardening, but would need to be cleaned if it is to be used for drinking water purposes, with costs equal to that of desalinization. “Ideally,” he says, “we should implement two water systems: one for drinking water, and a secondary one for agriculture and ponds. That would have the additional advantage that less water would be drawn from the aquifers.”

They also propose to invest in centralized water distribution systems. “The water level in most of our shallow wells, those that go down to 65 metres, is declining. Communities that depend



on such wells for their water needs may soon face problems. We suggest that they connect to a centralized water system, if that is possible,” says Tom. He comments that many communities still have a proprietary attitude towards ‘their’ bore wells and pumps. “This has to go. There is no longer any justification to say ‘this is my well, this is my pump, I won’t share my water with you.’ We need to develop a water system that serves the entire city and also connects as many greenbelt communities as possible.”

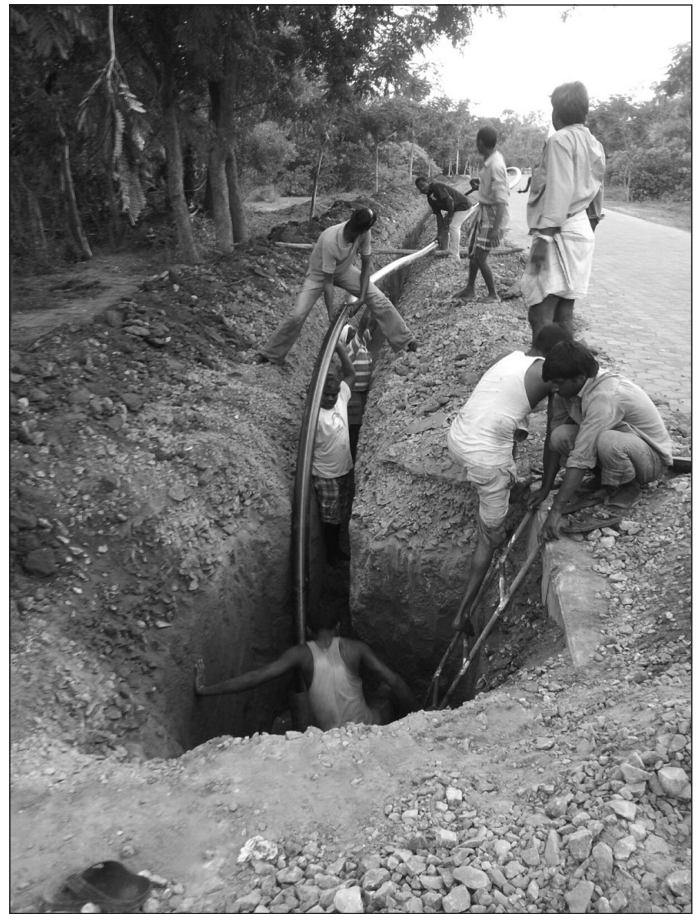
Auroville has three such centralized systems. They all are fed from one or more deep bore wells, with depths of around 150 meters. Auroville’s biggest system, the overhead water tank nicknamed ‘the elephant’ near Arati community, supplies 140 cubic metres a day to 21 communities in the Residential Zone and 40 cubic metres to the Town Hall area, serving in all approximately 600 Aurovilians. “This system, which is supplied by four major bore wells, can easily cover more communities,” says Luca. Two smaller centralized water systems are located in the Industrial Zone. “If, sometime in the future, desalinated water can also be supplied to these centralized systems, Auroville’s water requirement would be secured,” he says.

Water distribution and safety

Water distribution is equally important. “We want to install a ring mains along the Crown Road, a circular centralized water distribution pipeline to which as many communities as possible are connected,” says Luca. “The Residential Zone section of this pipeline was laid two years ago and we now want to expand it. At the same time, in nearly all communities the existing underground PVC piping systems will need to be replaced by HDPE pipes. Most of those systems are old and leaking; we have discovered systems where 30 percent of the piped water leaked away. More-over, PVC is unhealthy.”

“That aspect is often forgotten,” says Luca. “Each community needs to ensure that its drinking water is not contaminated. Pollution can be caused by improper capping or protection of the well-head; or by a septic tank or a waste water treatment system that has been built too close to the well; or by water leaking into a broken underground pipe.” He clarifies that in India, ‘drinking water’ refers to the relatively clean water that is used for laundry, bathing and cleaning. All households have some kind of filter to further clean the water, which is then used for drinking and cooking. For in the tropics, the sources of pollution are so numerous that is virtually impossible to ensure that bore well water is clean according to Western standards. Purifying water at the source, he says, is not economical. Moreover, in Auroville water chlorination is not accepted. So the only solution is that each household has its own water filter “and that they do not forget to regularly clean them!” he adds.

Auroville’s laboratory at Aurobrindavan has the facilities to do all the necessary tests, but testing has not yet been made mandatory. Tests are done whenever the ‘owner’ of the well asks for it, and results are kept confidential. “This is no longer accept-



Laying HDPE pipes along the Crown road. (Photo courtesy Auroville Today)

able,” says Luca. He proposes that the community authorizes the laboratory to do a mandatory test of all water sources once every two months, and publish the test results. “It is a matter of public health,” he says. “It is our duty to protect all in Auroville who use that water—our guests, our workers and ourselves.”

Towards an Auroville Water Board

Tom has meanwhile presented a substantial budget to purchase essential monitoring equipment and is in the process of reviving the Auroville Water Cell. “For many years, specialist and students have been studying Auroville’s water situation and they have written many reports that contain a goldmine of information. But Aurovilians are in the habit of highlighting those solutions they like. The main challenge is how to put all that together, and this is part of the work I have come to do,” he says. A first meeting has shown the challengers: proprietary attitudes, lack of collaboration, communication and trust, and no agreed-upon water plan for Auroville. Harmonizing opposing views is perhaps the major challenge to come to a solution to the water crisis. But time is fast running out.



Chronicles

Amidhar's story, part 2

The conclusion of the extraordinary, unpublished story of Amidhar, from the author's "How they came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother" series. Part 1 appeared in the previous issue.

by Shyam Kumari

Due to my poverty I could not come to the Ashram just then. I wrote four or five letters to Sri Aurobindo. I had started to concentrate in the heart as advised in *Bases of Yoga* and in the abridged edition of *Prayers and Meditations of the Mother*, published just then.

Later, Sri Aurobindo wrote regarding my lament about lack of results from concentration, "You are doing your best to concentrate in the heart-centre and to find out your psychic being and then to hand over your control to that Central Being and yet you complain that you don't get the result. But rest assured that the Lord is ready to walk ten steps towards you when you take only one, but even when the Lord takes ten steps and you take one, the time element has to be respected and allowed to act in its own time. You must not be unnecessarily impatient because as in the Vedas they say, the wisest man is one who is *dhira*, patient."

In 1945 I could scrape together the means to visit Pondicherry. I borrowed Rs. 200 from a money-lender for which later he paid Rs. 37 as interest. In those days for a poor destitute 20-year-old lad these were big sums. I informed the Master in advance of his scheduled arrival but added rather rudely, "I have a formula of my own sadhana as to what is to be done. But since you invite me to prove myself to you or yourself to me I am coming, but I will do sadhana according to my own way." Even after such a letter the Lord graciously sent permission to me to come for the August 15 Darshan.



Photo courtesy Shyam Kumari.

The Mother deputed Dr. Becharlal to receive and accommodate me. Dr. Becharlal made me comfortable. In the Ashram I came to know two sadhaks, Ashok and Albert, who told me, "This Ashram is different from other ashrams. Here meditation is not the only way of the sadhana which is done for realization and transformation. Working for the Mother and Master is the best way to do sadhana here, for service by the body is also a part of the sadhana. So try to get some work. Secondly, on August 14 the Mother gives a Darshan to give to the sadhaks the capacity to receive what the Master would give during the Darshan, and after the main Darshan on the Darshan day, she gives a Darshan again so that sadhaks may not fritter away what they have received on the Darshan day. So offer Pranam to the Mother to get the capacity to hold Sri Aurobindo's power." I accepted their first advice and asked for and was given work with Suresh Chakravarty—"Moni"—at the Central Bureau. As to the second, I felt "All this is bosh. I have full capacity to hold any power."

This work at the Central Bureau with "Moni" was to issue passes to the visitor. In those days double permission was needed, one to visit the Ashram and the second to go for Darshan. Daily the carbon copy of a typed list of about 15 persons was put before the Master for scrutiny. The names would not be in an alphabetical order. Moni's as well as my name did not appear on the list till August 14. All this time I was

in an agony of apprehension and sighed with relief when my name came on the approved list. I have preserved that first Darshan pass to this day.

On August 14 I went to the Mother and offered Pranam cursorily. There was no disrespect, but the proper attitude was certainly not there, the attitude which opens the mental, vital and physical of the sadhak to the Mother. I was a Vedantin, so to open myself to the Mother was not easy for me.

Bal Krishna Shukla who had given me the book *Bases of Yoga* had told me that during the Darshan nobody could stay in front of Sri Aurobindo for more than a few seconds and that the longest anybody had stayed was 15 seconds. Brimming with self-confidence I decided to establish a new record. I did not believe in the light of Sri Aurobindo. "Will he give me the experience of Chit-Tapas and Ananda?" I doubted it very much but thought that unexpected things did happen. There was no harm in trying. When I stood before the Lord and the Mother at first I could not look either at Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. Then fleetingly I looked into the luminous eyes of the Lord and saw two solid indescribable beams of light of Consciousness Force in many colours come out of them. They hit me, even physically, with such a force that my body became hot and within four seconds, against my own will my legs ran out. Nonplussed and crestfallen I was unable to understand how, even if Sri Aurobindo had achieved Satchidananda, could his gaze affect my body. After all I had done Hatha Yoga and had achieved control over my body. Now I realised that Sri Aurobindo's Force could act as a physical force does. It was a blow to my ego, and against Vedantic explanations.

The next day when I went for offering Pranam to the Mother I was in a chastened frame of mind. People had to take prior permission to speak with the Mother during the Pranam. But I spoke without permission, "Mother, what should be done about my future in sadhana? My difficulty is that I cannot find my psychic being in my heart, so there is no question of bringing it forth to give it charge of my sadhana."



Actually, even though I had talked about my psychic being I wanted the Mother to help me realize the Chit-Tapas Force.

She always responded to the hidden aspiration behind the words of the people. She gracefully nodded and smiled. She gave me a Champa flower which she has named "Psychological Perfection" and then said, "You are on the right path. You have done what you could and the rest you should leave to the Divine." I asked when I would get the total solution or a premonition about the solution, because at that time I was feeling as if I was facing an impenetrable wall. The Mother replied, "Whatever you want you will realize within six months." Now I thought, "Since the Mother says that what I want I will realize within six months then what is the need of living in the Ashram?" So I left Pondicherry on August 20. But, as we will see, she acted so powerfully that I had the realization within 24 hours.

Somewhat consoled by the Mother's words I decided to have Raman Maharshi's Darshan before leaving the South. I reached the Raman Ashram at noon. A sannyasi awaited me. He said to me, "Maharshi told me a boy would come from Pondicherry. He would be dressed in a white shirt and khaki shorts. Take him for a bath, give him food and then I will meet him in the afternoon." I protested that I would first like to pay my respects to the sage. The sannyasi replied that I would have to follow the instructions of the Maharshi.

Refreshed by a bath and food I went for the Darshan of the Maharshi and offered flower garlands and fruits. The Maharshi said something which I could not follow, for upon seeing the Maharshi I became dazed. A sannyasi who stood nearby said, "Maharshi is saying that you met somebody recently and told him or her about a problem, and you have been promised its solution. So if you want to realize That, sit before the Maharshi right now." Instantly I was almost driven to sit down cross-legged in front of the Maharshi and was completely absorbed in a samadhi which lasted one hour in which I merged in the Chit-Tapas consciousness. It was as if I was a part and parcel of a big,

bursting and endless Supernova, or was a *pinda* of *tej*, a massed circle of light. I was merged in an all-pervading infinite self-conscious light blazing like the sun. It was the experience of all light and all knowledge and infinite movement together.

I suddenly woke up from my trance and saw the Maharshi's eyes turning away from me. Then I remembered that my leave had expired and that to join my office in time I would have to return that very day. Much against my will, I asked the Maharshi's permission to depart. But the Maharshi said that for my experience to stabilise I should stay in his ashram for six months more. If I did that I would have the full experience and a continuous realization of the Sat-Chit-Ananda state and would become a Poorna Siddha. The Maharshi added that during this period he would also give me partial charge of his ashram. He further said, "Just now I have to talk with these two or three persons. This sannyasi will show you around the ashram." The sannyasi showed me everything and told me about the facilities I would be entitled to if I would remain there.

It was strange that during the half hour I was shown the ashram, Raman Maharshi met me at least seven or eight times. He would turn up at every turn I took. I wondered if the Maharshi was trying to hypnotize me or was playing a game of hide-and-seek with me. After a tour of the ashram I returned to the Maharshi and said, "Sir, I have to go home. My mother is dependent on me. I cannot remain here just now." Maharshi did not say anything, instead the sannyasi replied on his behalf, "It does not matter. Go back home. Afterwards if possible come back." My visits to Sri Aurobindo and Raman Maharshi were, in a way, an experiment. I had candidly written to Sri Aurobindo that while in the Ashram I would do sadhana in my own way.

In those days there were two other luminaries revered amongst the spiritual seekers: Swami Ramdas and Anandamayi Ma. I had read many books written by Swami Ramdas. I felt it was not necessary to see him but very much wanted to have the darshan of Anandamayi Ma, in the hope that she might give me the realization

of the Ananda aspect of Sat-Chit-Ananda. I did not then realize that I already had had this realization while meditating with Raman Maharshi.

After some time I somehow arranged for some money from my office, took leave and went to Almora on my way to the Patal Ganga Ashram of Ma Anandamayi. In a shop in Almora I met Shri Krishnaprem but did not pay much attention to him because I reasoned, "This man is a Bhakta, I am a Vedantin. What have I to do with him?" Unfortunately just then Anandamayi Ma was not in her ashram. So I decided to go to Kailash and Manasarovar instead. Since my childhood I had worshipped Shiva and had done japa of the Gayatri mantra lakhs of times. Now I mused, "If I go to Kailash who knows that there I may not have the Darshan of the Supreme Lord. Also by the time I return Ma Anandamayi may return to her ashram. So I started on this arduous pilgrimage in the company of the famous Swami Pranavananda—a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of London.

The tale of this travel would make a thriller. I will chronicle some highlights only. During this period I visited numerous places. One of them was the river Ganga Choo. Its waters carried a constant flow of gold. But the area was heavily guarded. Nobody was allowed to pick up even a pebble. Food and lodging arrangements during these travels were most simple and living conditions very rigorous. On heights above 12,000 feet I and my fellow-traveller would just stretch a piece of cloth on a wooden frame and sleep under it. Sometimes we had to sleep on the frozen snows or on some glacier's moraine. On most of the nights at about 2 a.m. I would come out of my flimsy shelter to look at the sky and stars from such heights. In Kailash I witnessed a strange phenomenon of many tall sky-touching light-shapes moving and criss-crossing like search-lights near the horizon. But these strange Beings of Light never came near me. After travelling for a few weeks our party which consisted of four pilgrims and four servant-cum-guides reached the Kali Gange Glacier.



We camped on a high plateau. The servants began to light a fire for cooking, which took double the usual time on those rarefied heights. The youngest of our party, I usually felt very hungry after a day's hard climb. Impatiently I would ask the cook to hurry. That day I was in a self-rapt state. Well realizing that food would be ready only after an hour or more, I took a handful of roasted grams and ate them as I walked towards the awesome glacier. This glacier remained frozen up to a certain point and then due to some geo-thermal heat it would suddenly melt and after flowing some distance would vanish in the mountain and gush out some distance away. I reached the edge of the glacier at the point where it melted and sat near the swirling snowy waters and began to sing in a state of *atmananda*, in a pure joy of self-existence. I still had few of the roasted grams in my hand, when all of a sudden I drifted into a timeless, spaceless samadhi. The Samadhi Ananda was so condensed and concentrated in me that I became like a piece of wood. Words cannot describe this felicitous realization. Immobile and rapt I sat for six hours in that formidable place and was lost in an all-enveloping consciousness where I felt oneness with the whole universe. I had no sense of body and could have hurtled thousands of feet in the swift-flowing melted snow of the glacier. I chanted some musical mantras whose meaning I did not know. I had been sitting like a stone for six hours. Then my fellow pilgrims accosted me and I came out of my deep trance.

Amongst many occult and spiritual experiences of the Himalayas which are too numerous to be chronicled here, another one stands out. When I stood before the famous peak Guria Mandhata I saw the peak as a God and the snows were as if the laughter of Shiva. This experience of the divine grandeur of the Himalayas is beyond description. Only Kalidasa has caught some of its greatness.

During my travels in the Himalayas, thousands of miles away from Pondicherry I had the realization of the all-pervading infinite and the existence of a divine element everywhere. And there, amongst

the snow-clad peaks at last I found my sheet anchor, a firm faith in the Divinity of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Also I realized that Pondicherry was the best place for sadhana. The elements that stood in the way of an integral faith, my self-regarding ego and the sense of my own importance vanished, to be replaced by humility and love for the Twin Avatars of Pondicherry.

In 1947 I again came to the Ashram for the August Darshan. This time I went to the Mother for Pranam with full humility and with a prayer that this time for me the Darshan might be as Sri Aurobindo would want it to be. I tried my best to open myself to receive from the Mother the power to retain the Darshan riches. On the Darshan day I advanced slowly towards Sri Aurobindo. This time I was determined to set a new record by standing in front of Sri Aurobindo for more than 15 seconds. "After all, I have done Vedantin sadhana. I must prove myself," I thought with a 25-year-old youth's confidence.

As I advanced towards Sri Aurobindo I saw on the Darshan couch instead of Sri Aurobindo, the Godhead of Guria Mandhata in all its effulgence. The Lord's eyes encompassed and radiated Sat-Chit light and this effulgent laughter-filled mass of light was like the red pollen in the heart of a beautiful bud of roseate golden hue. From this roseate light a vibration of soft love spread out and touched me. This touch was so sweet that I felt a sort of sensation, till then unknown to my dry Vedantin heart. For the first time a movement of Love touched my heart. I had some feeling that two people, one of them probably Nirodbaran, gestured me to move away but I ignored them. I stood there for one or one and a half minutes still holding in my hands the lotus flowers and garlands I had brought for offering. Two minutes passed. Then Sri Aurobindo shut his eyes. The whole scene of Guria Mandhata vanished, but still I stood firmly and thought, "When the Lord will open his eyes I will see him again."

Meanwhile to save each precious second, I hurriedly put the lotus flowers and garlands in the box kept there for this pur-

pose. Sri Aurobindo again opened his eyes and this time I saw him as the Nara-Singha Avatar, effulgent with a golden mane. Since I had practised Tratak for years I gazed at the Lord and saw his beautiful hands, and also noticed the curtain behind the couch. Sri Aurobindo kept looking at me. He neither closed his eyes nor gestured me to move away. But by now the two persons standing guard became thoroughly agitated. The Mother noticed their agitation and she was about to break out into laughter but suppressed the impulse by covering her mouth with her handkerchief for half a second. But her laughter was reflected in her eyes, twinkling with merriment. As my attention was drawn to the Mother I realized that it was not the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo alone but also of the Mother. I bowed to both. Sri Aurobindo lowered his eyelids. Then only after doing Pranam did I move away.

For 15 days I went to all the Pranams and Darshans that the Mother gave and felt that she could bestow on a sadhak the greatest Siddhi. Most of these precious days I passed quietly in the Ashram compound. In those days there was a garden in place of the Samadhi. One day I felt the need to have a mantra of Sri Aurobindo, and soon after, while reading the book *Yoga-Diksha* by Anil Baran Roy (a collection of letters written by Sri Aurobindo), I got his mantra from the book and to this day the mantra is with me. After 15 days I went back to join service. There I read the book *Among the Great* by Dilip Kumar Roy.

On reading it I was very much disturbed. I thought, "Why had Dilip even thought of Sri Aurobindo's departure?" For days the question and the poem constantly revolved in my heart.

In 1950 my mother said to me, "You wander all over the country. Take me also on a pilgrimage." "All right," I replied. "Let us first go to Pondicherry. From there we will go to other holy places." (Now I could afford to take my mother on a pilgrimage.) We came for August Darshan. I saw Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in their own *swaroop* but my mother had the Darshan of Shiva and Parvati instead. She told me, "Now that I have seen the living Shiva



and Parvati, I have no need to go to Rameshwaram or any other holy place. Let us remain here for some time." So I cancelled all our other pilgrimages. It was an unexpected grace. Now I could live in the Ashram for the few weeks of leave that still remained. I began to do some typing work for Purani.

One day Nolini came to Purani and asked him, "There is some long matter of Sri Aurobindo to be typed urgently. It has to be sent to Bombay within five or six days. Can this young man who types for you undertake this work?" When Purani asked me I gladly agreed to do the work. What a windfall! I was asked to go for typing the script to Kishore Gandhi's place who lived in the Society House. Kishore Gandhi was asked to look after my comfort. Everyone expected the work to take five or six days. On the first day I sat down to type at 10.30 a.m. Kishore Gandhi came and asked me if I would like to have tea. I requested him not to disturb me and worked with total concentration and finished the work by 4.30 p.m. Kishore Gandhi was surprised at this "feat".

I was given some further assignments. Several times Sri Aurobindo asked that I should take some payment but I firmly refused. Then Sri Aurobindo instructed that I should be shown the cupboard where all his printed books were kept and to choose whatever I did not have. As I had bought most of the books already I chose two or three small *Savitri* booklets in green covers, *Letters* series I and II and some articles. In these books I found answers to many problems which had baffled me for long. For example, I had always found the experience of Brahman consciousness incompatible with body consciousness. Now I understood the secret of different planes of the being and drew a plan for a mental understanding of Sri Aurobindo's conception of the manifestation. Earlier a certain Jean Herbert had made a crude attempt in this direction. After seeing Herbert's book I had started to work on this project.



Darshan photo by Cartier-Bresson, 24 April 1950. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

This work continued from 1948 to 1961. In between I had sent to Sri Aurobindo a draft for correction. Sri Aurobindo made some corrections to the placement of the Central Being on the chart.

Through this typing work for Sri Aurobindo I understood the truth of what Ashok and Albert had told me on my first visit that work is the body's best prayer to the Divine and also realised that Brahmananda cannot descend into the cells unless one physically served the Guru, the Divine.

On this visit something of the utmost importance happened. In 1950 before my visit to the Ashram I read an issue of a Gujarati astrological magazine *Bhavishya Vani Patrika*. In this particular issue had been printed the translation of a Maharashtrian yogi's article about Sri Aurobindo. This yogi had made the Kundli—horoscope—of Sri Aurobindo. According to his calculations Sri Aurobindo might leave his body in 1950. I brought this is-

sue with me and one day showed it to Purani. Being an astrologer I too had made my own calculations which confirmed the findings of the Maharashtrian yogi that Sri Aurobindo might decide to leave his body of his own accord.

Now I showed the magazine and my own calculations also to Purani and said that there was a conjunction that pointed towards death, but being a Yogi Sri Aurobindo, if he so willed, could reject death. Purani went with all these papers to the Mother. When he came back he told me that the Mother had kept the papers with her. He seemed grave. I felt that on that day Purani had a premonition of what was to come, for when in September I told him that I was going back, Purani asked me, "Can't you stay some more days?" But due to financial and service constraints I had to leave. In spite of my calculations I had not the slightest inkling that Sri Aurobindo might choose to leave his body. I had presumed that Sri Aurobindo would prolong his life by his Yogic Force.

On the day of departure I ordered a beautiful rose garland and, holding it in my hands, went to the Playground to take leave of the Mother. I had not even informed her of my plans, yet came to the Playground intending to garland her. She was inside her room. People had begun to line for the ground-nut distribution. Along with my mother I took 10 or 20 steps towards the Mother's room when suddenly the Mother came out and walked towards us. She stopped before me and bent her head slightly for me to garland her. But I was so astonished and nonplussed by her unexpected appearance that I gave the garland in the Mother's hands. She put it around her neck and stood for about half a minute in front of us. Love and blessing flowed from her eyes. Both of us did Pran-am. Then I took permission to leave. The Mother walked towards the Guest House still wearing the garland.

In September 1950, after a happy stay



in the Ashram, I with my mother boarded a Bombay-bound train from Madras. The Razakar movement of Hyderabad was at its height. The train suddenly made an unscheduled stop at a small station near Adoni. It seems there was some Urse (a Muslim religious festival) at Gulburga and crowds of armed Muslim devotees clamored into the train. The compartment became so crowded that my mother, a heart patient, nearly suffocated. I tried to prevent still others from climbing in. There were hundreds of intruders and the railway staff and police looked on helplessly.

In response to my attempt to block entry to our compartment, a young Muslim, clad in a black coat, rushed at me with a long dagger. He forced his way into the compartment and occupied my seat, nearly crushing my mother. The hooligans did not stop at that but began to abuse me. They asked whether I was going to Gulburga. I lied, "Yes." This is what they wanted. They threatened, "We will wait for you outside the station and cut you into pieces."

At this time I silently called the Divine Mother for protection and, within my heart, kept repeating her name. I shielded my mother with my body as best as I could. She was barely conscious. After a long delay the train started.

The ardent invocation of the Mother's physical presence drew her to our aid. I saw a figure of the Mother appear. She descended into an elderly Muslim sitting there. He looked like a priest or Fakir. Immediately this venerable man began to speak with authority. He told the rowdies to stop abusing me since I had given up my seat and was offering no opposition to them. After this the miscreants fell silent.

I kept on calling the Mother silently and repeated the mantra: *Om Anandamayi, Chaitanyamayi, Satyamayi, Paramé*. Three nerve-wracking hours passed. Finally the train arrived at Gulburga and the crowd of Muslims got down. The youth in the black coat again threatened me, "I will wait outside to finish you." The train, scheduled to stop for only seven minutes, remained at Gulburga station for 45 minutes which seemed to me like an eternity. When at last the train steamed

out and passed Wadi junction, I heaved a sigh of relief.

This was the first time I had used this mantra in a critical situation and realized through harrowing experience its tremendous power.

Fifteen years later I narrated this incident to someone from Nadiad who told me that, due to the danger, the Mother had put up a notice in the Ashram that nobody should go via Gulburga just then. Other devotees who left after Darshan for Bombay had taken another route. By so many means, and so wonderfully, the Mother protects her children.

As soon as I read in the newspapers of Sri Aurobindo's departure I decided to come to Pondicherry. Alas, I reached Pondicherry on December 9, 1950, a few hours after the Lord's body had been laid in the Samadhi.

As I bowed at the Samadhi a hand stretched out from inside and rested on my head. I heard the words, "So, after all, you have arrived, my son!" Then peace and calm settled over my body and permeated my whole being.

For the next few days the Mother did not appear for the morning Balcony Darshan. Then she gave Darshan and distributed a photograph of Sri Aurobindo to all the Ashramites. I looked at her while receiving the photograph. She had put on a pure white dress. That day she wore no royal crown, no lipstick. Her face was almost waxen and her eyes looking towards one knows not what.

I had the impression that, in spite of the exterior dress or look, the Mother had ascended to heights which I had not experienced earlier while having her Darshan or during the various interviews I had been privileged to have.

After 1945 I had visited the Ashram almost every year, sometimes even twice a year. I noted two particular things about the Mother—the changeability of her face and the color of her eyes.

In those golden days sadhaks could have the Mother's Darshan many a time in a day. I had the following Darshans regularly:

1. Darshan in the early morning at about 2.45 a.m. when the Mother descend-

ed from her upstairs room with Pranab.

2. The Balcony Darshan.

3. Darshan at about 7.30 a.m. at the staircase when the Mother distributed Aspiration or Purity flowers.

4. Window Darshan at about 9.30 a.m.

5. Darshan at about 1 p.m. when she went upstairs and threw flowers at the gathered sadhaks for them to catch.

6. Darshan at about 3.30 p.m. when she left for the Tennis Ground.

7. Darshan while she played tennis.

8. Darshan when Dahyabhai offered her a bouquet of roses, when she came out of the Tennis Ground.

9. Darshan at the Playground when she received the salute during the March Past.

10. Darshan during the ground-nut or toffee distribution at the Playground.

11. Darshans (a) on Darshan days, (b) on birthdays, (c) on Christmas day, (d) when she came to see a film or a drama, (e) Darshans during Puja days, (f) during special interviews.

12. Darshan in the Playground (Mother's room).

At all these Darshans I observed that the Mother's face seemed to change visibly. No one photograph of hers depicts her fully. Indeed, a stranger, seeing a collection of her photographs, might see them as photographs of different persons, for the Mother manifested many different aspects of the Divine.

The color of the Mother's eyes ranged from sapphire blue to black or emerald green, as well as appearing to be sometimes blue or green or brown or gleaming copper-red of varying shades. The shape of her eyelids also changed. Each gaze had a special meaning. During special interviews with me her eyes appeared to take on an Egyptian shape and would become deep emerald green.

In 1951 I underwent my first surgical operation. On the operation table I started to repeat the Mother's mantra. Such was the effect of this mantra that the anaesthetist failed to make me unconscious.

The Methodist priest-surgeon, a friend of mine who knew of my occult powers, finally told me to relax and to widen and loosen. Then instead of con-



centrated repetition I made a widening out movement. Soon I lost consciousness and the operation was a success.

Between 1956 and 1962, I had the privilege of having the Mother's Balcony Darshan on numerous occasions. I used to stand almost always in the second row. There were 20 to 25 persons in the first two or three rows. K. D. Sethna, Tara Jauhar, Dr. Sanyal, Gangaram, a polio-affected boy and many others whose names I do not remember, were usually in the first two rows. I will give a glimpse of the Balcony Darshan of 1958-59 as I remember it, to make my point.

The Mother usually appeared on the balcony suddenly, almost always between 6 to 6.30 a.m. After coming to the balcony she would first look and smile at those in the front line—with a mother's rosy-red smile. She poured her love on each one. Then she would glance a second time, looking into the eyes of each of the thousands present. Then a third time she would look at the horizon as if blessing those who were not physically present. Then a fourth time she would look at everyone. And finally the fifth round, towards the front liners. This, to me, was as if the Mother of the Universe was taking up the work for the day and blessing and inviting us to follow her and then would throw an almost unseen glance towards the horizons—the significance of which is difficult to decipher. A person in the first row probably could not see that, as she approached the balcony, the Mother first looked towards the sky. Later she revealed that at first she looked at the gods assembled for her Darshan.

There was something special about the Darshans from 1956 to 1959. The Mother would appear and, after a second look at those present, she seemed to twirl and throw a lasso of consciousness-force-invitation into the hearts of the sadhaks to lift their psychic up. We had

to keep ourselves open with the psychic in front, ready to be picked and lifted up and follow the Mother's subtle form gliding away, plane after plane, towards the highest planes of consciousness. In a few moments the Mother's gaze would turn towards the centre of the sky. I always felt I had left my body and was flying behind the Mother, with Sri Aurobindo beckoning somewhere, though his iridescent silhouette was not clear. I would see my body as if it had no soul; even the Mother's body seemed inert. We travelled far for a long time. I felt as if I was walking in the very supramental red-golden dust-laden countries and shores.

Ultimately the long samadhi-type concentration would end, the Mother's gaze and consciousness would come back. She would look to see how we had fared,

During that difficult period I had total faith in the Mother. I would empty a blessing packet in a liter of water and drink it slowly. This water would stay fresh up to 24 hours. With this "tonic" I recovered within a month.

then she would give a sweet special golden-rose smile and withdraw. As the Mother's gaze came down, I could hear a highly audible "hah" coming from the crowd. To me this indicated that many others had felt the strong pull as their physical and psychic beings strained beyond endurance, and that they sighed with relief when the soul came back. But of course one cannot speak with authority about the experiences of others. The 1958 calendar and some other photographs show the Mother in that entranced state.

The Mother had said that 1955 would be a difficult year. In my case this certainly proved true. My mother had for years aspired to live in Pondicherry. Alas, in 1955 she was attacked by a fast-developing type of cancer. I wrote to inform the Mother and prayed for her guidance. Nolini noted the Mother's answer which was conveyed to me. She said, in effect, life and death are almost normal processes and, when one has to face them, one should have peace

and equanimity and should invoke the Divine help from moment to moment. My mother was given some medical aid due to which she lingered on for a whole year. Then she passed away peacefully.

Throughout the year of my mother's terminal illness I attended to my job during the day while some friends remained with her. Then at night I took up the task of nursing her. This 24 hour workload sapped my tremendous vitality. I eventually suffered a nervous breakdown and for one month could hardly take any food.

During that difficult period I had total faith in the Mother. I would empty a blessings-packet in a liter of water and drink it slowly. This water would stay fresh up to 24 hours. With this "tonic" I recovered within a month.

Some of my neuro-surgeon friends, and other eminent surgeons who have sometimes to operate for 12 hours or more at a stretch, also take the blessings-pack-

et water while operating and feel new vigour and are guided to make the correct decisions on which depend the lives of their patients.

From mid-February 1956 I began to have unusual spiritual experiences. I wrote to the Mother and obtained permission to visit the Ashram. While I was making the necessary financial arrangements and for leave from work another couple with their four-year-old son decided to accompany me. I again wrote to the Mother and obtained permission for them too.

I always travelled to the Ashram via Bombay where I used to spend a day with a friend. Upon reaching Bombay this time I was dismayed to discover that my friend had not made train reservations to Pondicherry as he usually did. Furthermore, he proposed to join my group along with his wife and son. I sent a telegram to the Mother for permission for three additional persons but this time received no reply.

Meanwhile, my friend attempted



to get train reservations for our group. Apparently all seats had been booked for two months ahead. In spite of persistent attempts, he returned from the railway station each day with no results. It began to look as if the visit would have to be cancelled.

I meditated and prayed to the Mother for help and received the indication that I should myself try to make reservations instead of relying on my worldly-wise friend.

Accordingly, I went to the Bombay Victoria Terminus Station with my friend trailing behind. At the station I remembered the Mother and prayed again for help. Suddenly a gentleman appeared "out of nowhere". This stranger offered to use his influence in order to get the required reservations, but only I should pay the money in advance. Even though my friend advised against such a step, I agreed to this proposal and placed the money for the tickets in the stranger's hands. In no time at all he came back with the tickets. Furthermore, he refused to accept the commission which I offered him with gratitude, and said that he would take it only after putting us on the Madras-bound train a week later.

When along with my group I finally arrived on March 9, Nolini told me the following story. I had amended the size of my group so many times that Nolini, who was handling the affair, finally got fed up when he received my last telegram. All the Ashram guest-houses were full. Nolini suggested to the Mother that he would wire refusal to me for want of accommodation. Sweet Mother, however, told Nolini, "He is a loving, naughty boy." She suggested that it would be better not to reply at all to the telegram. If I did not come for want of a reply, then he could let the matter rest there. She further instructed Nolini to accommodate me somehow if I came anyway, and to tell me that any inconvenience would be temporary and the Mother wanted me to take it as a part of sadhana.

Everything turned out well. Within 5 days we were given the best of accommodations. Those were blissful days for me and my party. Each day began with the Mother's Balcony Darshan and she dis-

tributed ground-nuts or toffees to all in the evening at the Ashram Playground. Life was a marvel indeed.

One day, while we were walking to the Ashram from our guest-house, a child of our group ran ahead and had a nasty fall in the central park. There was a deep gash on his forehead. Even before we could reach him, a kind French policeman picked up the injured boy and bandaged his forehead with his handkerchief. He also stopped a worker from the Ashram Dispensary who "by chance" was just then passing by. She took charge of the situation, leading the boy and his parents to the Ashram Dispensary. There the doctor closed the wound with nine stitches. He did not give any anti-tetanus injection, explaining that the Mother was not favour of strong medication.

That same evening the sprightly boy joined the distribution queue at the Playground. He was far ahead of me. When he reached the Mother she pressed her hands on the bandage, keeping them there for a long time. When I reached her I told her the story. The Mother gave her blessings. The wound healed within a week and left no scar.

Some time later my cousin's wife developed serious stomach trouble. The doctors proposed to immediately remove the greater part of her stomach. Obviously there was a grave risk involved in such a major operation, and my cousin decided to ask for my opinion.

After my cousin explained the situation, I sat down to meditate. It was approximately the time when the Mother went to play tennis. I concentrated upon the Mother and called for her help. Then I saw her standing before me with her long, white shoulder bag. She said, "I will be present during the operation." Fully reassured by her reply, I advised my cousin to go ahead with the operation. The missionary surgeon scheduled to perform the operation was friendly with me and knew of my occult powers. He gave me special permission to be present in the operation theatre during the surgery.

I prayed to the Mother and with my eyes open, I saw her coming along the

corridor of the operation theatre, holding an instrument box which resembled the white bag which she carried to the Tennis Ground. I watched her participate in the operation herself, wielding scalpel and other surgical instruments with her deft hands. Afterwards she remained with the patient for three days.

On the fourth night I was sitting near the bedside of the patient. The Mother was also present. Then at 3 a.m. the Mother got up, smiled and said to me, "She is safe. I will leave now." Then she began walking down the hospital corridor. Full of love and gratitude, I followed behind her. From a distance of 100 feet the Mother looked back at me, gave a sweet smile and then vanished.

Interestingly, there were half a dozen similar operations around that time. All the patients died within six months to six years except for my relative who lived for nearly 37 more years. Even though most of her stomach had been removed, gradually she had even been able to return to a normal diet.

As soon as I began to earn some money I decided to offer ten percent of my salary to the Mother on the first of each month. This was to be separate from my birthday, Darshan, Pranam and other offerings. Later I subscribed to a scheme of Ashish Prasad, wherein those who annually offered a sum—be it big or small—to the Ashram, received all the messages and blessings. In addition to my own offerings many of my friends soon joined this scheme and my group was known as "Friends of A". (This scheme was later discontinued.)

Once an officer ridiculed me for "squandering" my own and other people's money on offerings. On an inner impulse I said, "Sir, a day will come when you will come asking me to send your offering to the Ashram." The officer looked at me skeptically and assured me that he was not likely to do such a "foolish thing". Soon afterwards many of the I.A.S. officers came to me to give offerings and collect blessings-packets and books of Sri Aurobindo.

Then, in 1965, the resistance of the skeptical officer broke down. He not only



became a subscriber to the above-mentioned scheme but also would become anxious if, due to postal delay, he did not get his blessings-packet on time. He also began to avidly read Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and later formed a group of his own and pursued yoga.

In 1960 I came to Pondicherry on a 25 day visit. After 15 days I received a letter from home informing me that the very boy, whose forehead injury had been cured by the Mother in 1956, had met with a serious accident. He had compound fracture of the leg. Due to extreme blood loss the boy's life was in danger. The doctors would keep the boy under observation for some days and then might have to amputate his leg. Even the amputation would be risky. They asked me to rush back.

I went to the Mother, told her about the accident and showed her the letter, asking permission to leave earlier than I had

planned. To my surprise the Mother firmly refused. She shook her head and asked, "Have you the power to connect bones?" I could not reply. The Mother again said, "Do not go. Send my blessings —that will be better." Overcoming my feelings of wanting to be near the boy myself I obeyed the Mother. I was very happy on one count, though, that the Mother loved me so dearly that she would not permit me to leave ten days early.

As soon as the boy received the blessings-packet he stopped screaming from pain and began to sleep and eat. The doctors were able to set the bones and put the leg in plaster. They said that some miracle had saved him. When I eventually reached his home the boy himself told me, "It is good that you sent me the blessings-packet because it has cured me."

I looked at the X-ray and saw that the bones had been broken into small pieces.

Yet the leg healed and, within six months, it became normal without leaving any scar. The boy could soon jump and ride and carry on all his activities.

The Mother's health took a downward trend after 1960 or so and her Playground classes, Balcony Darshans and even personal interviews were limited or suspended from time to time, though she continued to do all her other work. Until then I had always received permission to visit the Mother whenever I had written to her. Other visitors were granted interviews during that period but, every time I asked, Madhav Pandit told me, "The Mother has not replied."

I grew impatient and wanted to send another letter. Madhav Pandit said that cannot and should not be done. The

no reply came to my letter. This time I did not insist and left without having an interview with the Mother.

When I visited again after a few months I asked permission to offer Pranam. This time I received two cards with permission to see the Mother on two different dates. I used only one card and surrendered the other one.

During the years 1956-1960 I used to sit in the Meditation Hall praying for the Mother's Force to descend in me. One noon a golden light descended into me direct from the upper floor and began to interpenetrate my body. It went down and down and suffused my physical body, in and out, except for some opaque spots on some parts. In due course I wrote to the Mother about my experience. She

did not reply. She called me at the Playground. Since I had not prayed for Darshan or interview, and since during that period interviews were re-

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Mother can reply at any time and if she chooses not to reply, it should be accepted. I thought something was wrong somewhere, so I directly wrote to the Mother about not receiving any reply.

On the next day I read on the notice board, "Amidhar to see Nolini." Nolini simply told me that the Mother had kindly agreed to see and bless me that evening and Nolini would be present. At the appointed time I went up and prostrated before her. She blessed me with her usual smile and put her hand on my head. But before parting I noticed an admonition in her eyes, "My son, it would have been better had you not insisted." I felt whipped but took the lesson to heart.

When I returned to the Ashram for my birthday I prayed for the Mother's blessings on my birthday or on any other day before my departure. Again I saw that others had been permitted interviews, but

restricted it was a Divine Bounty for me. The Mother accepted my Pranam, looked deep into my eyes for a long time and pressed my head with great force again for a long time and smiled at me. She did not say anything and I did not ask.

During this period of 1956-1960 I regularly wrote to the Mother about my experiences. Sometimes I sent the letters directly and sometimes through Madhav Pandit. I particularly stressed the point that many of the experiences corresponded to the Mother's experiences which appeared in the *Bulletin* issues much later. After a lengthy correspondence on the subject one day Madhav called me and said, "The Mother says it is not necessary to write all about your experiences because those of the Mother's children who are near to her or are in tune with her consciousness naturally get such experiences."

In 1961 I was posted to a remote out-



post as a magistrate. My residence was a house not only ill-provided but haunted as well. One day during my meditation a figure resembling Swami Ramatirtha suddenly appeared before me. It soon took the shape of a tribal Pathan poet, Rahim, who had died long ago. This ghost forcefully dictated a poem to me in half Hindi, half Urdu. The poet dictated the conditions in this life and in the after-life—which is a life in suffocating darkness and misery without sun, moon or stars. The arrangement of the syllables was cryptic and powerful and it pierced my being like an evil mantra.

Naturally, I was most unsettled by this disturbing and depressing experience. The apparition repeated its visits to me for the next several days. Once this contact made me so sick that I had to adjourn all my court cases. I returned home and lay flat on the ground. Then I felt something like a bow which threw me involuntarily outside my body. Now my subtle body floated near the ceiling above my physical body lying on the floor, which I could see myself.

Then, in a detailed prevision, I was shown how my gross body would be cremated. Alarmed at this development I suddenly remembered to repeat the Mother's mantra. As soon as I said the first syllable "*Om Anandamayi*," I fell down into my gross body with a terrific thud. It was an extremely painful entry and I remained resting on the floor for half an hour during which I kept on reinforcing my subtle body by repeating the Mother's mantra. As soon as I could gather my wits sufficiently I went to the post office and sent a very long telegram to the Mother about the vital attack I had just experienced and prayed for help.

I was an accomplished Tantric, knew most of the occult methods for going out of one's body and frequently did so as well. However, this involuntary and violent exit from the body and the re-entry without resonance between the two bodies greatly injured my subtle as well as nervous parts of the physical body. Even with the Mother's help I continued to suffer for several years. Though outwardly I lived a normal life, inwardly my subtle body was being

etched by an acid-like pain.

Between 1961 and 1965 I came to Pondicherry several times and informed the Mother of all the developments. Ultimately she freed me of all the ill effects. But for one who lives under the protection of the Mother attacks become opportunities. During this period I had the concrete experience of the vital worlds described in Book II of *Savitri*.

In 1965 I was returning home after a visit to the Ashram. My travelling companions were a lady and a boy who had accompanied me from my native place. The young and attractive lady was wearing gold ornaments, even though I had advised her not to put them on during the journey.

Near Broach station an uncouth man with a dirty beard and dirty clothes entered our compartment. This fakir carried bad vibrations. After he entered, for some unknown reason, the other passengers began to leave the compartment one by one.

He first gazed at me and tried to hypnotize me. Sensing the situation, and, in accordance with the traditional method of fighting back hypnotic waves, I looked between this fakir's eyes and began to smite him with the Mother's mantra: *Om Anandamayi, Chaitanyamayi, Satyamayi Paremé*. Instantly he looked hurt and seemed to realise that his art would not work upon me.

Next he tried to hypnotise the 15-year-old boy. Sensing this, I held the boy's hand tightly and started to send waves of the Mother's mantra in several directions and quietly but firmly told the boy and the lady not to look at the fakir. They obeyed me. The exasperated magician next threw up a cloud to make me and my party fall asleep. This I fought with the *japa* of the Mother's name. The cloud dispersed. Thus all the efforts of the magician failed. He next stretched out his hand to touch my companions, but before he could I touched his hand and the Mother's mantra gave the magician a rude shock. Ultimately, having been vanquished by the Mother's mantra, the unsavoury visitor got down from the train several stations later.

A great relief, elation and gratitude flooded my heart. My companions knew

very little about the grim fight that had taken place, though they reported that they had felt uncomfortable during that period.

In my native place a circle of friends and devotees had gathered around me. These people had faith in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother though they had never visited the Ashram. An "unofficially recognized" Sri Aurobindo Centre was opened there.

The group of devotees met every Saturday and carried out a program of prayers, readings and meditations. One visitor to the centre was my friend, Dr. Natwarlal Rawal, who attended the meetings with his wife and children. He had also installed and worshipped photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in his house.

One evening while I was cooking my food the maid-servant of Dr. Rawal brought me the message that I was urgently needed at the doctor's residence. I left my meal uncooked and hurried there and found Mrs. Rawal sitting alone with her four-month-old daughter in her lap. The child had developed high fever, diarrhoea and vomiting the evening before and had not slept during the night. Dr. Rawal was away from home tending a patient in a distant place and Mrs. Rawal had not called another doctor, not knowing whether her husband would approve. I took the girl's temperature. It was 106 degrees Fahrenheit. She was semi-conscious. At my touch she clung to me and insisted upon sleeping in my lap. On my own responsibility I called a doctor and sent a telegram to Dr. Rawal. The doctor prescribed antibiotics. But the streptomycin he gave had no effect and the fever did not come down.

Now I began to recite the Mother's mantra. For nine hours I sat with the child in my lap, continuously reciting the mantra and repeating the Mother's name. I did not even eat or go to the bathroom. When evening came I suspended my usual bath which I took before my evening prayers to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and started an incantation of Sundaram's Gujarati prayer-song addressed to Sri Aurobindo. At the end of the prayers I could feel the



temperature of the child had come down. The thermometer showed 104 degrees. In another half an hour it came down to 102. After some time it came down to 100.

At this moment Dr. Rawal arrived and was astonished to see me sitting with his daughter in my lap. After hearing the whole sequence of events he, who did not believe in miracles, said that surely it was a miracle. He asked me to recite the prayers again so that he could join me. After food we started to pray to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother together. Soon the girl's temperature became normal and she regained consciousness. I handed her to her mother who was shedding tears of joy.

Then I went out for bath and tea and when I returned at 8 p.m., the child insisted on coming to me. Therefore I sat with her in my lap again and could leave the house only at seven the next morning. After this incident the whole family became dedicated devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Almost throughout my life in government service my duties were arduous. Daily there were two to five thousand papers to sign and 100 to 250 visitors and applicants to see. Yet I managed to find time to read some law journals, do some judicial work and also to read all the Ashram magazines, *Mother India*, *Bulletin*, *Dakshira*, etc. After doing all that I usually finished work by 3 p.m.

My I.A.S. bosses, who worked hard till late in the evening, asked me my secret. "It is simple," I told them. "Before starting my work, I remember the Mother and offer her my efforts. Then I try to remember her even during the work and aspire for her help. And at the end of the work I express a prayer of gratitude."

I always found that if there was something wrong with a file or document the pen stood still or the ink spilled or something of the kind happened. If the applicant was a fake I saw it from his expression. I worked 30 years like this in the moffusil and the secretariat.

Another span of my service required that I do hazardous jobs. There had been at least ten attempts to kill me by violence or poison. Each time the Mother warned me.

During this period in the secretariat I translated portions from the *Bulletin* and helped some state ministers to understand the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Some of these people visited the Ashram and gave generous offerings.

But the most blessed job that I was privileged to do was to get Arvind Nivas—the house in which Sri Aurobindo had stayed for years—transferred to Sri Aurobindo Society Baroda. A whole group of devotees headed by Amba Premi were doing their best to get possession of the sacred building. They met the Governor and the ministers but did not know the red-tapism and bureaucratic ways which were obstructing even the orders of the highest authorities. It was Minister Babubhai Jashbhai Patil, a devotee of Sri Aurobindo, who sent the file to me to get the needful done before the Arvind Nivas orders could be finalised.

Then, even though I suffered from high blood pressure I went running from minister to minister, paid the assistants who do not forward a file without taking money, got the orders finalised at 11 p.m. and posted them to the Mother, Navajata, Amba Premi, Dr. Karan Singh and the Accountant General. Then fully satisfied, I returned home at night, took bath and cooked my food at 1 a.m. Later I wrote to the Mother and obtained blessings for all those who had graciously helped. Amongst them I must mention two names: Dr. Javraj Mehta, the Chief Minister, and Shri Babubhai, a minister in Hitendra Desai ministry, apart from some officers of P.W.D. This great task having been fulfilled I voluntarily retired in 1972.

The hard life I had led took its toll on my body. After 1972 my heart started giving trouble. Somehow for a period I lost faith. It was Dr. Sarkar, now living in Pondicherry, who gave me back my faith in my path and the Mother. And I have, even with a severely damaged body, retained the resolute spirit, to live as long as the Gurus want me to live and serve them more and more with each breath. I fully realise that but for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Grace, I would not been amongst the living.

When I visited the Ashram in 1972, as usual I prayed for and was granted an interview by the Mother. On that visit I noted that the Mother looked into my eyes for an unusually long time. I still remember those dark eyes piercing my very soul. The Mother seemed to be conveying to me, "Son, we are not going to meet in this body again." In spite of the shock these silent words gave me I kept my poise and hoped for some miracle to change the decision.

Some months afterwards, on a cold November night, I retired to bed earlier than usual. I felt a little pain in my chest and had no inclination to read, write or listen to the radio as I usually did. Reclining on a pile of pillows I began to recite the Mother's mantra while concentrating upon her. At about 8 p.m. the Mother's face suddenly appeared before me. It was as if she had descended from the sky. The radiance of her golden aura filled the room. She said, "Son, you are not going to sleep tonight. I am leaving my body. I will remain with you till the morning." Fully alert I sat up straight and went into a semi-trance. The golden vision remained with me for hours.

Around 5 a.m. I finally dozed off for a little while. Then at 6.30 a.m. a sudden knock awakened me and I found some of my friends and fellow-devotees outside. They told me, "Take whatever pills you are taking for your heart ailment. [I am a heart patient.] We have some bad news." To this I replied, "No need for pills. Has the Mother left her body? Is this the news?" My friends were surprised and asked, "Who told you? Have you heard the news on the radio?" "No. When you came I had been asleep and have not listened to the news. But I know all the same," I replied. Then I told them about my vision, and we all proceeded to our Center for meditation.

*Every good and kind
deed brings light, restful-
ness, joy—the sunshine in
which flowers bloom.
—The Mother*



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

by John Robert Cornell

Continued from the last issue...

2. Glimpses of Grace

*The mountains in their anchorite solitude,
The forests with their multitudinous chant
Disclosed to her the masked divinity's doors.*
—Savitri

A mythic scale

We drove into the inner canyon as the last touch of twilight slid down the sky and disappeared over the horizon. Walls loomed up nearly half a mile, dark as coal against the night sky. A single point of light flickered 1500 feet up one large sheer face. Binoculars revealed a pair of climbers up there, their flashlight silhouetting their hanging platform against the rock.

Zion Canyon is vertical and monumental. Sheer walls of red and white Navajo sandstone rise above the valley floor. By day they seem to overhang the road in some places, ready to tip over and flip the world upside down.

Each time we entered Zion's inner canyon, I was surprised how immense the walls are. Each time we left, I would shrink them down in memory to humanly manageable proportions. "Scale always relates to us," says designer Richard Saul Wurman. Once, when their physical mass poured into my eyes undeterred by any protective filter, I rebelled against the intrusion, "How can you be that big? Are you real?" An echo seemed to come back from that immensity, "Are you real?"

I was caught. This scale takes my breath away. At the same time it provokes a deep sigh of relief.

Zion's cliffs are set aside by act of Congress as a national trust. They are a public



Photo courtesy John Robert Cornell.

proclamation demanding to meet something proportional in us. They are nature's Capitol Mall, but on a mythic scale, much grander than our copy in Washington, D.C. We have named them accordingly: Great White Throne, Towers of the Virgin, Great West Temple. In this valley we are walking in the land of legend and long ago. We are in the presence of a majesty like the sunset on Half Dome.

But the sacred places that I want to tell you about now are on a different scale. Instead of being grand, public, and celebrated, they are intimate, hidden, and unknown. I scarcely realized that I was "there" till I had left. The perception of sacredness or specialness was a quiet, growing thing instead of an overwhelming blast of magnificence.

The one that I stumbled on in Zion National Park is not in Zion Canyon itself, the valley of those monolithic cliffs. It is a little, unmarked sandy flat beside a desert creek with the unromantic name of Coalpits Wash. The sand there was a faint mauve with a suggestion of gold highlights...

But let me take you there gradually. I don't think that we can get there together in a rush. I had to go in step by step, a gradual immersion until something in me was calm enough to employ the other way to listen.

Something else at Watchman

We arrived here yesterday between two and three in the afternoon. Heavy masses of gray clouds were packing in from the west. Big drops streaked past us as we leveled the stabilizer jacks on our tent camper. In our rush to get the camper top up, we forgot the awning. The storm clouds, however, soon moved on to the east; and we spent the rest of the afternoon filling water bottles, arranging the beds, organizing our storage shelves and bringing in bread and ice from the store. The day was short. We lost an hour on the way here from California.

This morning I got up at seven and walked a few hundred yards in the cold, still air to Watchman trailhead. The trail zigzags up the canyon wall to a ledge above the valley. I surprised an extended family of mule deer on the lower reaches of the trail a little while ago. Two of them were frisking. One squatted to relieve herself. The younger ones were nipping the seed heads of bunches of tall grass. They turned their heads and watched me silently with those liquid eyes. The trail took me within 20 feet of a large doe who regarded me so intensely I thought that she was going to walk forward and demand a handout as I passed.

Now I am on the ledge looking west across the outer canyon of the Virgin River 500 feet below. The towering buttresses of Zion rise orange and tan and white all around. The white towers across the canyon are stained rust in some places, their tops rounded into domes and mosque-like spires. Some of the cliffs are as dramatic as Yosemite Valley's, but the debris falling from their faces forms fans that are more visible amid the dry climate vegetation of Zion.

I sit down on a flat rock to rest and watch. The plants here seem to have an individual presence that I don't notice in lush areas. I remember the same sense of plant presence in other desert places. After sitting quietly for a little while I become aware of a spiky blackbrush beside me with its tiny leaves and yellow blossoms. As I focus on the bush, I notice something stretching between us—fingers, strands of



something barely visible connecting us. The strands coalesce into a pool that contains both of us, bringing into focus detail and color I had not noticed. For short moments we cease to be I and it. And then, with my sense of separation sufficiently compromised, comes the quiet revelation that the bush is somehow aware of its surroundings and of this hasty being that has just lumbered in here for a rest.

I cannot think of this land as simply the parts of a great dumb machine. Something else is here, nearly bursting through the veneer of plant and stone. Last night the full moon, her glow softened and spread around her like a cloud of luminous hair, rose between jagged spires of the eastern towers. Their black teeth framed her face. Her glow outlined their fierceness. Karen said that it was a once-in-a-lifetime apparition. The moon rose toward a silver and gray mosaic of clouds overhead. When I went out a little later, the clouds were completely gone, leaving a clear sky.

A larger seeing

We are sitting beside the trail on a little shelf above the Middle Fork of Taylor Creek, about a mile from the trailhead. The maples and box elder are just going from bud to baby leaf, more yellow than green. Several 30-foot firs lend their bluish tint to the canyon palette. A big deer fly is buzzing around me languidly.

Before me as I face north, a massive cliff hangs above the sloping benches that ride down to the creek. The cliff's vertical face accounts for two thirds of the canyon's height. It is cinnamon in the sun except for gray stains where water has spilled over repeatedly from the top.

Across the creek to my left, the slope has a fresh blend of new deciduous colors and silvery sagebrush. The wind blows cool. The sun fingers my back and neck, relaxing and reassuring.

Baby fir are trying out the sandy soil along a bleaching log lying in front of me. A wiry-limbed annual sprouts green leaves that look like short grasses. A clump of true grass manages in the sand a little

above the trail. Some of its cousins have already fruited into silver-tipped seed heads although it is only April. They look like primitive miniature corncocks.

A raven's croak bounces off the cliffs upstream, and then an answering croak from downstream. I just start to get comfortable, but the cold-edged wind returns, wakes me up, and then dies off again. I feel drowsy. Could take a nap here lying on the earth, wile away the sunny afternoon and then have to scramble in the cooling shade of evening.

Whenever I remember to ask "Where are you?" a larger seeing opens over my head. I am still sitting here looking with my physical eyes and my mind, while another viewing center seems to widen overhead into a larger seeing—very intense, but quiet and undramatic. It is more of a 360° seeing than a pie slice of focus. It easily embraces these trees that extend stories over me without making them into objects. It seems to be in the leaves and the rock, while not being the leaves and the rock, at least not as I know them. Whenever I return to that greater seeing, it sends subtle falls of energy, rolling waves of peace down my back from... what? Above? My heart starts to swell. My back feels fuller.

He loves Her—that thought just now drifted through my awareness on a breeze.

The wind returns with a fluorescent blue fly. The wind is a westerly and cool. The fly dances back, way too nimble for my swats. A plane drones in the distant west, a gigantic work-fly.

I'll bet that rock face, that red cliff across the creek is warm. I would like to lean on it, press my body into its warmth. The creek tinkles softly. Otherwise a delicious silence.

I am ready to go on, but the blue fly is sitting on the next page of my journal and then jumps onto my knuckle.

Mauve and gold at Coalpits

I started up the Coalpits Wash trail at 12:40 this afternoon. No one else at the trailhead, no one in sight on the trail. I am here to look for the mystery in the heart

of the land, for some contact with the Infinite. I don't know why here. I have only hunches to go on.

This part of Zion is a rolling desert of sparsely-covered, decomposing, red-brown mudstone. The wash to the left of the trail carries a shallow stream with occasional cottonwoods and junipers along its banks. Scattered wildflowers, scarlet paintbrush, cliffrose covered with cream blossoms.

I surprised a big dark-gray lizard on the trail a little while ago. He rushed into a hole in a boulder and disappeared. I waited. In a couple of minutes he reappeared in the entrance. He stopped and looked out. I could see only his head and front legs. Shadows in the hole made his exact color hard to identify. His head was triangular, like a miniature triceratops. We watched each other for several minutes. He didn't move.

Now I am sitting on a big rock overlooking the creek several hundred yards upstream from the confluence of Coalpits Wash and a dry tributary. The rock is a blend of tan and gray sandstone with little touches of gold and cream and orange. Faded patches of gray-green lichen cling to the surface. Black moss trims the cracks and corners.

There are places along this trail that are attractive and inviting, but nothing as lush as the hanging gardens and meadows we found along Birch Creek yesterday inside Zion Canyon. Instead there are isolated miniature encounters, like another lizard that I watched at the base of the multicolored boulder. He was a different species, probably a banded rock lizard, smaller than the first one but still 11 inches nose to tail. His head and upper body had alternating horizontal bands of gray and black. The gray bands warmed to a luminous light brown on his lower body and then back to gray on his tail. The fellow crawled into a patch of greenery when he saw me but then came out the side and cocked his head at me for a while. Then he went down the slope toward the creek with jerky movements, like a robotic replica of his species.

A little later he rushed across the path



below me from left to right with tail high in the air as I watched eight brown and yellow butterflies crowded on a little clump of gold flowers. The butterflies seemed drawn to that clump of flowers by some magic force. Occasionally one would try to fly away, but then it would circle back as if helpless to resist their charm. One tried to come back in a choppy headwind. She missed her landing attempt and avoided an embarrassing crash in the sand only by pulling up at the last second.

I am still having trouble getting here. My focus is diluted, a patchwork of attention and distraction. I feel a sense of futility, like: This place isn't it! And just as I think that to myself, the trees and bushes seem to jump into existence before my eyes. It's as if they stomped their feet—very quickly, so that when I look up they are innocently motionless again—as if to say, “Don't you get it? Here we are. (Here I am.)”

Where? Where are you?

The canyon walls loom up into my awareness, dwarfing me with their immensity, their endurance, their age, their patience. Huge boulders lie at precarious angles on the steep slope above the creek. Some of them will surely come down before long. Already there are many garage-sized boulders in the creek bottom below that slope.

Oh, I get it! This is a rock slide area!

I am probably only half a mile from the alcove spring, my physical destination on this hike. But it's after 4 and I need to start back.

But now I remember a small event—small because it was so quiet, like a ripple of breath on a pond.

Forty-five minutes ago I stopped in a little flat filled with smooth mauve sand and colored stones. When I stirred the surface with my walking stick, the upturned sand was all gold. The contrast between mauve and gold was not so much striking as enchanting. Delicate shades blending gracefully into a royal sweetness of color.

All afternoon I have been asking where you are, yet I almost missed you when the sand began to glow.

The stones on that little flat were different than anything else I saw all day.

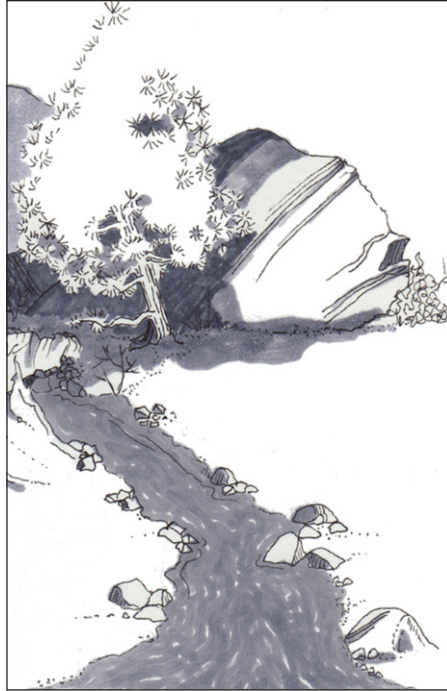


Illustration by Karen Cornell.

They were not encrusted with salt like those closer to the stream. And they were all of soft colors and shapes: white, red, orange, gray-green, gray-blue, gray, black. Even the blacks and grays had a pastel warmth. Nothing dull or garish.

Karen loves beautiful stones. I stooped looking for one to take back to her. So many of them here. Then I noticed that a calm had settled on me. I had slowed down. This little area, enclosed by some large boulders on one side and by small trees and bushes on the other side, was enclosed by something else. The physical shelter of the place barely hid a subtler kind of shelter. It was very silent and it felt... I don't know what the word is. Like a benevolent and encompassing presence, but not quite visible.

And it suddenly occurred to me that taking a stone might not be the way to treat a sacred place. So I asked the spirit of the place to show me a stone for Karen if it was all right to take one. Otherwise I would leave everything as I found it.

Among all of those beautiful stones, some part of my mind was surprised that I could not find one that was just right for her.

I left that little enclosure feeling at

peace and... what? embraced? bonded? None of these words fits—too big, too coarse, too trendy and romantic. This was more ordinary, if a quiet peace and embrace can be ordinary. Touched by grace is more like it, touched by grace, enabled, somehow mediated, by that place.

That's all.

I was reminded of Peter's words on Mt. Carmel, “Lord, it is good to be in this place. Let us build three temples...” But there was no blazing apparition here. Just a gentle infusion of something. A subtle invasion. It came into me like a quiet breeze enters and fills a valley. Everything in the valley continues as before. Nothing is disturbed. Nothing resists. The lizard continues hunting flies. The river does not change its course for the breeze. Top soil does not blow away as the farmer plows. The cottonwood continues to gather sunlight by the river bend. No one is distracted from his activity, but everyone is profoundly refreshed. I call it grace, but like that something in the streets of Pondicherry, it was entirely undramatic. I would like to call it natural: The way it should be always. The answer to the buried longing.

Can one go on a trip looking for the Infinite and find it in a breeze or a patch of sand?

While I was hunting among the rocks in that place for one to take back to Karen, I even found a piece of petrified wood, strikingly different from the sandstones and shales. It was semi-polished on one side, rich browns and golds. And then the infusion of that something came over me. In a few seconds the place was softly aglow, nearly numinous instead of dry and alkaline.

The sun is slanting down to the west. I am by a green pool below a little falls. I would like to go on, see the spring ahead. Next time I shall stay longer, perhaps till twilight.

You see how it came? So quietly, so unobtrusively that I almost missed it in my busyness. I needed the miles of walking to dissipate even the public grandeur of Zion Canyon. I needed the solitude of the little wilderness trail. I needed the calming silence of those hillsides to even notice the grace.



A single skin

We've been in Zion a little over a week. Several apparitions, but no sustained experience of Your presence.

Last night I was sitting here in the truck reading. The truck faces north, and out the right window Bridge Mountain hangs in the sky between a break in the trees. I am starting to feel on familiar terms with that peak. It anchors me. It stands and holds while I move about. It is there every evening when I return. Last evening it shone in the setting sun again. Its movie plays more slowly than the water in the river or the humans coming and going. It is an elder in that sense, built up millions of years ago, raised by earth forces, and carved into its present shape by the great artisan. There is a small flat area on top, probably covered by trees. The white sandstone common in the high country here occupies the 500 feet just below that flat top. Its sides are angled, a right triangle from this viewpoint. The sandstone is broken and rough. A cave sits above a crack that plunges down and widens into a part of the mountain obscured from my view by a tree on the other side of the campsite.

To me these mountains soar. They chant a hymn that rises toward the sky. Geologists tell us a more dispassionate story: The mountains are not soaring or reaching. They are in fact moving in two directions at once. The forces of gravity and erosion are inevitably drawing them down, leveling them. The Colorado Plateau, however—that great bulge covering the converging parts of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico—is still rising. (A jet trail drifts intact over the top of the peak and continues rapidly southeast. The sun sets it glowing.) The plateau is reaching upward, and the Virgin River has carved away the weak parts and left the mighty standing, taller still.

And everything is moving by at a different speed. The jet trail is already south of the opening in the trees that is my window to the cliffs. The wind moves quickly. Sunlight inches down the west wall of the valley. Ants and stink bugs and deer all

move within their own range of speed. The trees leaf and blossom and drop their leaves, but slowly they grow. They have more than one set of speeds, somehow coordinated into a single thing, a unity, a single being. There is something in that tree by our neighbor's tent that makes it one, even though three main trunks branch up from the base barely a foot above the ground. I try to see the unity of the tree, the one tree beyond the words, beyond idea or language. Above that junction, it looks like three trees; but at the base, all of the trunks have joined into one. And at the earth—have all the plants joined into one? The earth seems to have a single, though varied, skin of life. I get a chill as I look over the softly waving grasses and see a single skin, a great living creature on whose chest I sit, amazed. In our astronomers' search for other worlds with life or the potential for life, I think to myself, we are looking for Her.

Automatic referral

I am sitting in the truck this morning after two days in the back country. I packed up the Right Fork of North Creek on Friday and spent the night. So much to see, but it makes such a temporary impression in my body. I can feel the images already slipping away, falling into the hole of the past, returning by some magic gravity to the moment from which they came. Here are some of the images that still remain:

Frog people lying quietly on the rocks. I saw hundreds of them sunning on steep-sided boulders mid-creek or swimming, spooked from their camouflage by my passing. I kept seeing them as frog people, not animals as I usually think of them, but as little alien clans, sometimes seven or eight together on one rock.

Or maybe they had emerged from the rock itself, so akin to it they seemed. At first they were invisible, nothing more than an irregularity on a boulder jutting from creek or bank. Then an irregular lump would spring into the clear water and swim below the surface. After a while I started looking for them before any movement gave them away. They became

eyed lumps, molded into the rock like a baby snuggled into a pillow, daydreaming there with a glazey gaze. The color of their skin matched the hue of the sandstone. Some were gold, a shining gold that was no imitation tan or yellow, but the color of the gold lacquer that I used to get in little bottles as a kid for painting cork-bodied fishing lures. Others were silver, their sheen heightened by the moisture on their skin.

Other images from the kingdom of the frog clans are more kaleidoscopic: a ten-foot water slide coming in from a side canyon upstream from my camp; scooping and filtering drinking water on a triangular rock in the creek across from the big juniper where I slept; slipping through the split in a garage-sized boulder; a pair of garter snakes sliding side by side along the bank; cooking in the tent to get away from sticky, biting flies; the white parachutes of fragrant sand-verbena flowering near my campsite; two toads burrowing into wet sand near a pool alive with long strings of eggs and thousands of tiny tadpoles; the six-inch garter snake that didn't move when I stepped over it as it lay sunning on a rock; a stretch of creek flowing clear over flat, smooth sandstone slabs; the loud eerie whistles at twilight the first evening; great black volcanic blocks across the creek as I climbed back up the basalt cliffs to the trailhead; Karen smiling at me there in the twilight.

The imposing scenery of Zion wasn't so evident on this backpack. I paid more attention to small, creekside microworlds, the schools of fish in the deep pools, the frog clans, the butterflies. Wildflowers were everywhere, but not large and lush like the ones inside Zion Canyon, despite some big purple patches of minty desert sage.

I discovered that I can still carry a pack, still enjoy the wilderness alone. But the purpose of the trip, finding you out here, wasn't furthered much. Yesterday morning I asked the question, Where are you, God? A heightened awareness seemed to materialize above my head. Something invisible between my fenced awareness and the presences that are these trees and foliage and cliffs seemed to dissolve.



When I lived on the east side of the Sierra Nevada, the mountains would sometimes force themselves into my awareness in a way that overpowered my customary sense of importance with their immensity. But the response I feel to these plants and cliffs after the question isn't just a matter of size. Their realness as individual beings—or as their own existences apart from me—is what comes through.

Well, that's not it exactly, either. It's not that they are separate from me. It's that they are not simply or mainly part of my experience or sight. They have their own independent existence. I am not the big news here. This may sound obvious, but it is a different way of perceiving, a shift to another kind of consciousness, containing a compassion and admiration that relates to them not so much esthetically, in the way their beauty or form is satisfying to me, but in themselves.

Hmm. I can see I don't know how to say this.

Let's try this abstractly: By means of the question, something escapes from the automatic referral of everything to self. That automatic referral—everything orbits around ME—not only tangles up our perception but also our language. But somehow in the question, the compassion and admiration reach orbital escape velocity, if only temporarily. Then the existence of the trees and mountains as separate from “me” becomes a connecting with something larger that is not separate from anything; rather it is something that we share in.

There is something bigger and marvelous here, but all bound up in the trunks of trees and waving leaves in the wind, bound up, trapped in a frog's skin or a fly's, and yet so... precious, so beautiful in the sun, so amazingly multiple. So real.

That is the opposite of what I was looking for here. I was looking for You. It was to be You and me. And “You” seem to be everywhere, except orbiting around “me.”

Sunlight has come again to our campsite, subtly thrilling the eyes and skin with color and warmth. The grass continues to wave, driven by a brisk breeze from the north.

Today is our last day in Zion.

Stories in Rippling Stone Notom-Bullfrog Road

Today Karen and I drove down Notom-Bullfrog Road along the long southern flank of Capitol Reef National Park in southcentral Utah. If Zion is vertical and grand, Capitol Reef is rounded, twisted, pockmarked. Its barren rock belies the rain forests and gigantic mammals that lived here a few thousand years ago at the end of the last ice age. Fossil remains tell of mastodons and giant sloths and saber-toothed cats. One compelling image from this era is the Short-Faced bear. It could star in your worst nightmare. This bear stood 20 feet tall on its hind legs. Standing on the ground today it could peer into a second story window. Its skeletal structure suggests that it was also swift-footed, a most fearsome predator.

Now this bear and its giant companions are gone. Gone too are the rains and the forests. Today rainfall averages seven inches a year. Capitol Reef is desert. Piles of bare badlands swell below fractured cliff faces near the visitor center. But more than desert, Capitol Reef is a geology teaching. Its landscape is littered with clues. Slowly it ripples to a rhythm much older even than the last ice age. It lies in a geological anomaly, a frozen tremble in the earth's crust, a fold of land trending north/south for a hundred miles.

The park features the remnants of this fold, visible because what the fold raised, erosion has exposed: namely layer after layer of rock built over the eons into a huge layer cake. The oldest of these visible strata was deposited roughly two hundred sixty million years ago.

A figure that big brings me to a halt. It is like a desert mirage, hard to approach. It is easier to slip by without trying to find some opening, anything comprehensible about it. But we are here to learn. We are looking for something larger hidden in the cliffs and the stunted junipers of this place. So we turn and try to look two hundred sixty million years down the dark tunnel of the past. That is 130,000 times farther back than the birth of Christ. It is 65 times

older than the oldest known fossils of our hominid ancestors.

We are stretched: elephants and giant bears and rain forests in Utah living on a sandstone cake poured and baked long before the first of our kind were here to witness it. We have stepped into a fairy tale. The comfortable walls of the familiar fall away.

But there is more. After three quarters of those eons had passed, tremendous earth forces bent a narrow band of this stone cake like wet clay into a long wrinkle, tilting its western edge up into the air as much as 7,000 feet. The layers bent at the buckle are not quite standing on their heads, but at a 60 degree angle they are two thirds of the way there.

Then, in the ensuing 60 million years, wind and water tore off the top of the fold, leaving its slanted remnants in view, the “reefs” of Capitol Reef.

As we drove south along the eastern side of the park this morning, we were on top of the cake, the most recent of these layers, the icing still lying flat just east of the wrinkle. When we turned west, following the road as it slashed and switch-backed its way 1500 feet up into the fold's resistant remnants, we were diving down into the past. Layer after tilted layer of long-buried sandstones and shales lay exposed to the seeing eye along the road. The farther west you go, the deeper into the geologic past.

I say seeing because to the unseeing eye, the 100 miles of terrain that we crossed today looks more like a jumble: long, straight trench valleys along the edge of the reefs covered with desert grass and sagebrush and scarlet penstemon; cliffs and turrets of colorful sandstone; rounded, crumbling mounds of parched mud; and, beyond the reefs, a snowy pass through the aspens on the shoulder of a volcano formed near the beginning of the rock-building period.

It is not so easy to feel the slow rhythms of rock when you are used to technical meetings and freeway commutes through forested hillsides. So on this drive we tried to make first sense of the jumble using these sanctioned stories of our day, the tales told by the earth scien-



tists and paleontologists, the public stories of these lands. They are strange stories and wonderful, our fairy tales of the past, the creation stories of our science. We sought them out each place we stayed in the Southwest, where so much of the past is on display if you know how to see it. Still, something is missing from the official versions. Edward Abbey put it this way:

These huge walls and giant towers and vast mazy avenues of stone resist attempts at verbal reduction. The historical view, the geological view, the esthetical view, the rock climber's view, give us only aspects of a massive presence that remains fundamentally unknowable. The world is big and it is incomprehensible.

Several times on the drive we managed to slip past the official stories and get a glimpse of something else. When we stopped at Anasazi State Park near the western edge of Capitol Reef, Ranger Larry Davis entertained us with stories about the Moki, the mischievous leprechauns of the Colorado Plateau. And we located possible openings in the countryside, places to enter and to hunt more intimately for the presence Abbey spoke of. Some of these openings have colorful and evocative names: Steep Creek, The Gulch, Lower Muley Twist Canyon. But the place that called to me the most was a little ridge on the eastern side of the reef where we stopped for a break and met a collared lizard.

I hear the call as I write better even than I did when we stopped there this morning. It was a quiet, unruffled call then, softer than the rattling of the pickup or passing worries about finding our way back to camp in time for dinner. I heard it, but it soon disappeared below the surface of my mental landscape. Still it was strong enough to surface again, now that my other concerns have passed. I don't know why it calls. It is like a faint glow in memory of the ridge and the abrupt folds and cliffs of the reef beyond it to the west.

I don't know if I can find it again, but I'm going to try. Maybe it will be the third sacred place of the trip. The second one, Cohab Canyon, I stumbled on our first evening here.



Illustration by Karen Cornell.

Cohab Canyon

That evening I walked up to Cohab Canyon, a crosscut perpendicular to the main north-south trending backbone of Capitol Reef. With its tiny side canyons, Cohab is a miniature of the grand canyons of the Southwest.

A path climbs through a hellish landscape of bare, greenish, baked and cracked mud badlands to get to the mouth of the canyon high above the campground. Cohab Canyon boasts none of the grandeur of Zion. Inside this toy canyon, the low red sandstone walls slump round-shouldered, almost skull-like, riddled with holes where the decomposing stone has collapsed or caved. There was no visible water, only evidence of the occasional flash floods of the desert canyon country.

I asked my usual question: Where are you, God? I can't see you.

At first the stone walls and plants leapt more fully into my consciousness like they have each time I utter the question. A larger consciousness takes over and I begin to see through its eyes. It is a larger seeing, something very still and clear, yet it's not exactly vision or sight. Rather it seems to straddle the border between sight and sound. It's very still, very wide, yet somehow active like a buzzing or humming or "mmmmmming"... but silently. And when I

can lift up into that seeing, everything has a greater quotient of realness. Sandstone edges, ripples of mauve and orange, the individuality of juniper tree and verbena seem to materialize in front of me, coming into focus as if I were just waking up from a dream.

In that overhead awareness I began to notice touches of redemption all around me in the little canyon. Wildflowers growing happily out of hot, dry sand. Miniature side canyons or caves too narrow to enter but penetrating 50 feet into the cool insides of the sandstone walls. The varnish on the surface of the walls left over from dripping water, instead of being a crusty tufa or a black stain like it is at Zion, is a translucent pearl, like a natural primer, a preview of some greater beauty to come.

Then, around a bend, I came upon a bank of sand—small, flat, creamy-white stones scattered delicately along a bank of clean, tawny sand, an arrangement so exquisite as to be almost translucent. I thought that I was looking into the origin of Navajo sand painting, seeing one way that nature taught the first Americans. It seems to me that beauty is just being born here instead of being full blown and grand like Zion. Perfectly shaped little pinyon trees share the wash with broken, twisted juniper survivors. Hesitant, fragrant sand-verbena manage in banks of loose sand, much more fragile looking than their well-watered relatives in Zion Canyon.

That was all.

I came down the trail from that little canyon spontaneously breathing more deeply. It was not from exertion, I noticed, remembering suddenly that I don't have to hold my breath here. Content, quieted and filled—the way I came out of the little sand bench at Coalpits Wash, with a sense of having been touched at the core by something infinitely benevolent and gentle in a land of spires and armored cactus.

The Fremont River Valley 400 feet below the mouth of Cohab is a desert oasis. Pastures and orchards pour intense green across the bottom lands, contrasting with the surrounding red stone and gold sand. The green is extravagant and beautiful. My eye rested in it for a while, but it is so



easy to take for granted.

No doubt that benevolent something is there, too, in that lovely green, but perhaps the familiar and the comfortable are the hardest places to notice it. It is too easy to sleepwalk through the familiarity of orchards and cottonwood trees and the frontier farm buildings preserved by the park.

In the desert environ of Cohab Canyon, one doesn't take anything for granted. Everything is precious here, living on the edge. Beauty is being pressed out of stone here. The sandstone and cracked mud are like a veneer. Something else is breaking through the shell.

Despite that conviction, a second voice inside wondered if that quiet something else was just wishful thinking, not the place itself. Maybe I imagined it. Maybe I just happened to be in a receptive state during that first walk into Cohab. I decided to return for another look before we leave Capitol Reef.

Unnamed wash

This morning I left Karen reading *The Earth Sea Trilogy* at the campground and drove off to find the little rise where I heard the call before.

A few miles north of the intersection of Notom-Bullfrog Road and Burr Trail Road, a wash tumbles out of the eastern side of the reefs. Two narrow openings in the sandstone cliffs feed into the wash. Viewed from the road, the first opening seems to end abruptly at a second wall of white sandstone behind the outer wall. The second opening looks like a slim crack in the cliff. The crack starts west but curves around to the north so that one cannot see how far into the reef it reaches.

I am sitting on a big rock near the entrance of the second opening. The sun hasn't yet climbed the high wall to the south that shades my rock. Slabs have fallen from the face of the wall recently, showing gold blends from red to tan beneath its light gray surface. The sand in the wash is almost cream. Little plants manage to find a living all around me. Several patches of *Estan penstemon* grow from the north bank of the wash.

The air is silent except for a soft buzzing constantly entering the breeze. There is no evidence of other human beings anywhere in sight, but I followed some large padded footprints as I came up the wash from the valley that runs between the cliffs and the road. Cougar hunt in this rocky wilderness.

Some large droppings on my rock remind me of the big owl that flew by as I settled into this spot. I first saw it at the little widening in the wash where I stopped for lunch. It appeared three times flying very low, once up into the slot where I was headed and the last time gliding north along the escarpment. Its wings stroked the air silently. No cry came from its round, flat face.

I am feeling edgy. I tell myself that the owl is a good omen, but I have not found anything else to support my sense of being called here. Is this a slot canyon into the reefs or just a short blind alley? My legs drag, reluctant to go the rest of the way and find out.

A hundred feet into the slot, past rock piles and weathered juniper logs, a dry fall with a boulder wedged at the top blocks the way. The ledge must be 15 feet high and the boulder another eight feet, with nothing but sheer cliff on either side. No way in here.

Back out in the wash I can see two ridges on the south wall reaching in toward the slot. Climbing up toward the lower ridge I notice something black and round in the crumbly soil. It is a Canon lens cover. Someone else has tried to get in this way. I reach the ridge and cautiously make my way up smooth sandstone angled at 30 degrees. The cliff rises on my left. Ahead my ledge levels off a little, but not until I cross a short, narrow and tilted stretch of steeper slickrock with no handholds and a long drop-off to the right. Imagination plays terse videos of walls flying by and a sickening feeling of weightlessness. My stomach is suddenly in my throat. I back off.

Two other attempts on the south wall meet the same end. Even the highest ridge on the southern approach to the slot ends with a long drop-off near its mouth.

Defeated, I work my way down to a small grove of juniper trees on the bank above the wash. These are the pygmy junipers of the desert. The dry air carries their greenish turpentine perfume. I stand in the soil gathered over the years by one grandfather juniper with 12 sprawling trunks and near-trunks. Many of them are battered and rotten looking, but all have green needle clusters on their branches. The air in the grove exudes a sense of calm. I appreciate this grandfather's endurance and make him an offering of water from my canteen.

Meanwhile a big thunderhead has come up from the west, the eastern-most point of its advance right over my slot. Farther out to the east another cloud cluster is raining over the Henry Mountains and slowly moving in my direction. I hope to beat the rain back to Highway 24. Navigating wet clay and sand on the Notom-Bullfrog Road in my little two wheel drive pickup is not an appealing thought.

As I trudge east toward the truck, I stop and look back at the slot. Defeat wrestles in my chest with something else. Respect. This part of the earth remains virgin, at least to my efforts. It is no less valuable for that. But what was that call that I followed in here? I don't know.

From the ridge beside the pickup, the view out to the east falls away for miles. More white cumulus have gathered over the snow-stained Henry Mountains. Nearer, layer after layer of colored soil: white, red, gold, yellow, green-gray—each color in its own separate stratum, most of them tilted up sharply toward the west.

I can smell the rain.

Big drops smear the dust on the windshield just before the road dips down to cross the clay bottoms of Oak Creek. Up on this low ridge, the road is mostly sandy soil and gravel. Traction is not a problem. But Oak Creek cuts through the ridge, exposing the red clay that it has carried down through Capitol Reef from Boulder Mountain and deposited here for thousands of years. Mix rain with this clay and you get a slippery paste. The rain comes down harder on the switchback down to the bridge across the creek. Clay coats the



tires. The pickup fishtails as it starts up the other side. It slides and stalls, lugging down to 10 miles an hour before reaching a patch of gravel that provides just enough traction to climb out of the valley and back up on the ridge. In another five minutes I am out from under the cloud and back in the dust heading north toward the highway and the campground.

Where the door swings

A second visit to Cohab Canyon has produced the same luminous heightening as when I came up there the first evening. That is good enough evidence for me.

Still, it's curious how we can blunder into a place of grace and barely notice it at the time. That has been my repeated experience on this trip, even though that is what I came here to look for.

I sit down to write after a day's walk or drive. With the physical effort of maintaining my balance in treacherous footing past, with the sensory stimulation of new hills and bird calls and fragrances gone now, and the mental effort of remembering to continuously orient myself in an unmarked and lonely landscape—with all of that past, I notice that something else tugs and glows in my memory of the day. Something like Half Dome's golden face would make a sweet swelling inside my chest. I say like Half Dome, but often it was much quieter, much less obviously grand, much more intimate.

The obstacle to a more immediate recognition is a tangled and subliminal stream of thoughts coursing through my mind as constantly as the blood through my veins. Habitually, persistently, it hoards my attention and my energy. It composes my ordinary and familiar world. Moment by moment, brick by brick, it builds and maintains my sense of self. It is a tireless workman, instantly plugging every crack in my walls. Try sitting for just five minutes with a completely silent mind and you will see what I mean. Sometimes only the shock of a new and radically unfamiliar landscape can break through this foggy thought-stream and really get my attention. Even then the stream manages

to maintain itself on center stage until I can slow it down.

But once that current slows down and pools, other worlds become visible. They are other worlds, but only relative to that little habitual current of thoughts. In fact they are always there behind the surface, even containing it and supporting its movement. And when they come into view, there is a strange familiarity about them that is entirely consistent with their always-there-ness.

When we see beyond the current of thought, there is nothing to think about and nothing to get excited about; yet there is a much bigger something in front of our face. And in us. Something bigger to be, or to participate in than we thought or felt. Something entirely new and at the same time entirely ordinary. Familiarity and wonder hold hands in those moments of grace. Kabir caught it:

Inside this clay jug there are canyons
and pine mountains,
and the maker of canyons and pine
mountains!

All seven oceans are inside, and hun-
dreds of millions of stars.

The acid that tests gold is there, and
the one who judges jewels.

And the music from the strings that
no one touches, and the
source of all water.

So we seem to be at an entrance, a place where the door swings between the "outside" and the "inside," between the clay jug and the maker of canyons and pine mountains. Maybe that is a good definition for a sacred place: somewhere with a door that swings between the outside and the inside. While this trip has been a search on the outside for sacred places, we have known all along that the sacred part was somehow about the inside. And that any list of sacred locations had eventually to include our own personal place, the body.

Light and dark at Taos

The body as a sacred place came to

light, so to speak, for me in Taos, New Mexico. Taos has its own sacred mountain that dominates the skyline of the town and of the Indian Pueblo for which the town is named. This mountain lies within the boundaries of the reservation; and the people of the Pueblo, based on five centuries of bitter experience, do not look kindly on strangers trespassing on their land. So we did not visit this mountain directly. But it was there, constantly in view; and the mountain and the sky put on a light show like I have seen nowhere else.

The light, in fact, is why we came here. It is what we remembered from previous trips. It is what drew the large artist community to Taos, beginning in the late nineteenth century. Words cannot describe the quality of this light, so Taos is filled with painters, lovers and makers of light. You find art galleries on every street.

Yesterday at sunset, for instance, the clouds massed heaps of molten, multi-colored cotton against the sky's retreating blue. There were five distinct hues on one large mass of clouds: gold, white, silver, gray, and salmon. Other clouds piled up at the same time in the west, east, and south reflected altogether different tones and intensities of luminance. They radiate the clean light of the serigraphs that you find here in the galleries. The light is so ethereal that it is hard not to believe that some other light is shining through the physical light from behind the swinging door.

In this glow of cloud and sky, some unspoken struggles between Karen and me came to a head. Or because of it. I can say now that it was likely the light around us that enabled us to take such a dive into the dark. But at the time you don't know that. You just notice that the familiar and the comfortable are breaking up under your feet, and that, like it or not, you are sliding through the swinging door into a horror story instead of the sacred place that you hoped for. Everything turns into its opposite. The sun becomes a glare uncovering every little deception. The lovely desert path is choked with cactus and claws. You sink up to your waist in wet clay. The paintbrush and lupine are all poisonous. Every way out is a dead end.



And all of the dark creatures of this story are your own brood.

Sure, at first it is easiest to blame everything on the other person. But blame does not make for a healthy diet, nor does it sit comfortably at sacred places. Sooner or later the other person turns into a mirror. The ground shifts again, and you are inside your own body. The outside battle comes inside.

I remember how the conversation started. I was feeling gloomy and discouraged. What was I going to do here in Taos? The dream trip was three quarters over. Going home was elbowing its way back into my image world. Old friend failure was perched on my shoulder, cackling in my ear.

When Karen asked how I was, I let out my litany of complaints. She pitched right in. She said she thought I was getting more and more like my dad, bitter and controlling. Outrage sprang up from the basement to get a ringside seat with failure.

"That sounds like an attack!"

"You've been in a black mood ever since we got here."

Words flew back and forth in the little trailer as weapon and shield. Caged resentment, worry, accusation and denial had their day in court. Hate slung its barbs. Fury paced on the sidelines.

After a while a detached observer might have noticed a few scouts looking for meaning or an envoy trying to carry understandings through the smoke. The exchange wavered between argument and searching discussion, as we both tried to get our balance in the dark. Eventually we bore down to foundations, our foundations together, our separate views of what makes us "we." And whether we thought it could survive.

My litany and her observation stretched into an eight-hour marathon.

The next morning I was calmer and Karen had come part way out of her own pit. We had grappled with each other, like the Grand Canyon or Capitol Reef; but I still had not grappled with myself.

That came on next, without any invitation. Morning after morning I woke before dawn still down in my horror story,

the one I thought I had climbed out of during the marathon. I would trace the feelings of dread and vulnerability. They led directly into my body.

In there I found again the familiar, harsh voice of the judge. He was screaming insults at me. You weak bastard! You bloodless coward, you pompous fool! His voice was glancing knives. I tried to listen rather than run. Only with full concentration could I attend to his onslaught without confrontation or flight. As I did, his tone gradually changed from hate to frustration to helplessness. Whatever he might try, he lamented bitterly, he could not goad me into effective action and engagement in the world. He sank into silence. Then he seemed to turn into something like the ghost of Christmas Past, showing me memory-pictures, scene after scene of opportunities I had squandered and people betrayed. A well of tears bulged up between us and burst. He/I wept together—constrained by my place in bed and in the sleeping campground.

Meanwhile I kept calling for help, calling on One who has guided me for years. As the tears ebbed, light seemed to come into my body. The focus of physical resistance moved from my belly to my butt and thighs. And a light began to illumine the puddle, the mush of passivity. I saw a dark, crab-like thing that inhabited there. I thought it personified the passive resistance to being embodied that I have felt since before birth. A golden light—something like the light of Taos—came into that formless mass of matter, or whatever it was; and the pattern of heightened consciousness and compassion returned again, this time in relation to my own flesh. It glowed. Everything seemed to be glowing subtly in there.

I began to see it, too, as a sacred place.

The next afternoon Karen and I walked dirt roads on the edge of town. Thunderheads built up over the sacred mountain. The air stopped. The jays and cottonwoods waited. At dusk the rain started. Lightning sliced the silence. The heavens fell. We lay together in the trailer, rain thrumming the roof, rain dissolving the tension outside and inside.

The incomparable Valley Sonora Pass barely

With its falls, its giant sequoias, its regal cliffs, Yosemite National Park is one of the most famous natural settings in the world. Karen and I have been here many times, but this is my first time here consciously looking for a sacred place. (I believe that I am always looking for them unconsciously.)

We have come from the desert, the high incandescent air of Taos, the wide dry reaches of northern Arizona, and the semi-arid Owens Valley of eastern California.

Karen, a forest sprite in her childhood, was excited as we drove into the Sierra Nevada Mountains from the east. She had worried about our trip into the desert, afraid she might melt or shrivel up and blow away. But somehow she managed to coax rain or clouds from every place of sand and stone we have been. I suspect fervent rain dances, inspired by her Native American ancestors, happened while I was away from camp those many times. This morning she was drinking in the sweet and green fragrance of her mountains as we climbed. She seemed to be coming back to life. It's so beautiful, it's so beautiful, she breathed over and over.

But I made a dumb mistake. Snow still blocks Tioga Pass, southern-most route across the Sierra. To save time and miles, I decided we could make it over Sonora Pass, the next route to the north, despite a highway sign advising against trailers and trucks.

The next sign warned of 26 percent grades 10 miles ahead. 26 percent! That must be a mistake, I thought. We had avoided one highway in Utah because of a 10 percent grade! But I didn't want to go farther north. That would mean taking a detour east around Walker River Canyon, where the flood of January washed out Highway 395. To get to the next pass, we would be heading exactly opposite the direction we wanted to go.

So I gripped the wheel, leaned forward, and we crept up the eastern side of Sonora Pass to the top, taking the steepest grades in first gear. At one hairpin



switchback we bogged down even in first, but it was short and we inched past it. At the summit we grinned at each other and shook hands triumphantly.

I can still feel the clutch in my stomach as I stared down the grade on the western side, our little four-cylinder engine roaring at 30 mph in first gear, and no brakes on 2,000 pounds of trailer and gear gathering speed behind us. Most of the trip we have used low gear to manage the trailer's weight on mountain grades. This time it was not enough. The downgrade was so relentless I had to ride the brakes. The narrow road hurtled down the mountainside without any safety shoulder. After endless minutes I caught the burned-tar smell of brake pads. Not a good sign, and no end in sight. The drop was so steep that I doubted if we could make it up from this side. Karen, meanwhile, was dreamily contemplating the soft new pines needles and leafing gooseberry bushes along the road. I, however, lost it. I began shouting.

I don't know if these brakes are going to hold much longer!

And then the descent flattened just enough to ease off the brake pedal. The drag of the engine took over. The danger flew by and vanished.

Storm song of the rocks

Driving into Yosemite Valley from the northwest, you pass one magnificence after another. In June, Bridalveil Fall is visible in the distance before you enter the valley. The road clings to the fire-scarred side of a sudden uplift in the mountains. You can see miles of folded hills farther to the west toward California's Central Valley. Then suddenly, just before the road plunges off the edge of the uplift into the Merced River canyon, it slips between granite walls enclosing the river into an intimate green-lit majesty. Dogwood and maple arch over the road. Close by, the emerald river, remnant of immense glaciers that once carved out this valley, swells and undulates along its banks.

The road splits; you cross the river and wind through a jade corridor sprinkled with pools of light. Fern Spring wells

out of the ground beside the road. Shortly you come to a break in the trees; El Capitan's granite mass juts 3,000 feet straight up from the valley floor. It seems to lean out over the road. Bridalveil Fall leaps again into view close on the right and then Yosemite Falls, with its two giant steps, the Upper and the Lower Falls, on the other side of the valley. After a wet winter, water is falling from Yosemite's cliffs everywhere you look.

The campgrounds are packed. On our journey we have become used to spacious, spartan campsites fortunate to have a few pygmy pines scratching a living in rocky sand or an occasional cottonwood in the wash. Here we find ourselves in a crowded canvas suburb on the edge of a dense forest. Campers are only a few feet away on all sides and the trees are tall, dark green and thick. There are more trees and people in this one campground than in all of the other ones from this trip combined.

Most of the five million people who visit this national park every year come to its heart, Yosemite Valley, which has lodging and campgrounds for thousands of people. That makes for a lot of human activity—shops, markets, weddings, school field trips, parties, trams, and immense tour buses. And massive traffic jams every weekend during the tourist season, which is most of the year. There is only one road into the valley.

Fortunately the valley is large and the crowds stick to the roads and the best-marked of the trails. Even on a summer weekend, it is easy enough to find solitude in the meadows by the river or the trails at the base of the north and south walls of the valley.

John Muir, father of the national park system, called Yosemite "the incomparable valley." It was his spiritual home. Yosemite National Park was the prize of Muir's life work, his writings, his courting of presidents and congressional leaders, his battles with the forces of exploitation and mere utility.

Here is calm so deep, grasses cease waving.... Wonderful how completely everything in wild nature fits into us, as if truly

part and parent of us. The sun shines not on us but in us. The rivers flow not past, but through us, thrilling, tingling, vibrating every fiber and cell of the substance of our bodies, making them glide and sing. The trees wave and the flowers bloom in our bodies as well as our souls, and every bird song, wind song, and tremendous storm song of the rocks in the heart of the mountains is our song, our very own, and sings our love.

Most of the conversations that you hear today in this place are of vacation and recreation. But there are multiplying, unofficial allusions to sacredness in the titles of the books carried at the Ansel Adams Gallery and in the Muir soliloquies staged by actor Lee Stetson at the visitor center. If you look and listen in a bit of sustained silence, the magnificence here speaks in another voice, and awe cannot help but answer.

Bridalveil Fall

You can hear the voice of the falls from the forested parking area. Your eyes search the surrounding fir, maple and pine for its source. Then through an opening high in the branches you see a pulsing white ribbon. It curves and ripples with life, diving headlong from the v-shaped notch at the top of the cliff 620 feet above the valley floor. This ribbon is a magnet and you are iron shavings. Now you are gently caught. Wonder climbs to the edge of your face. You see it looking out from eyes that have come here from all over the planet. The child in you grabs your reluctant dignity by the hand and drags it toward this marvel. You want to get close. You want to feel the spray of this diving god of abandonment, feel its misty roar vibrate your skin.

It's a short stroll from the parking area to the base of the falls. You take your time along the asphalt path with people from many lands. Snatches of French and German float by on the breeze. Indian saris and Chinese tour groups are all drifting toward the sound. Faces are smiling, eyes uplifted and ready. A loose, open canopy of leaves filters the sunlight and spray.

The path is not as crowded as the



tangled braid of humanity on the way to Lower Yosemite Fall across the river. Instead there is a feeling of intimacy. The maple and dogwood bestow on you a light, dappled camaraderie as you pass beneath their arms. Leaves and pine needles glint with rainbow droplets of spray. The air is filled with minute jewels. You climb the last damp incline to the viewing area, 50 feet from the slippery dark rock at the base of the falls.

Today is partly cloudy and breezy. The wind catches the bride's veil and stretches it out to the west into a wide, glowing cloud. Many small breaks and ledges in the cliff usually hidden by falling water pop into view. Twenty miniature falls sprout instantly out of the black rock like a choreographed garden in white gowns. The wind dies and the falls recovers its vertical composure. Diving comets and spreading streamers weave gaily down through the misty veil. They crash against the boulders directly below the lip and scatter spray and rivulets in all directions.

A little white cloud passes directly above the lip of the cliff. For a few moments the stream of water seems to be pouring directly out of the cloud, baptizing everything below.

I sit for a while on one of the benches wondering why I am in the midst of all of these people. Noticing something special about a place comes more easily when I am alone and quiet. People come to the viewpoint and leave. I stay there in the mist for half an hour and concentrate on the changing play of falling water. I don't need to understand negative ion theory to feel the happy lightening spreading in my chest. Just being focused is enough, letting my eyes stroke that awesome, plunging water and the drifting mist till I cannot tell if the falls is inside me or outside.

The Park Service does not advertise or manage Bridalveil as a sacred place, but people seem to sense it. Although the roar is not overwhelming like it is at Lower Yosemite Fall in the spring, people don't have many words. They are remarkably quiet and attentive, especially those middle aged and older. Of course, lacking that official identification, lacking even a lan-

guage of the sacred, many view this place as entertainment, a beautiful display, or just one more sight they have "to do" on the vacation rush.

"Quite a show, huh?" One man mutters to his companion. He looks vaguely puzzled, as if he cannot find words that fit this scene.

A mom hurries her kids along, "OK, gotta go if we're gonna do Mirror Lake and Glacier Point and..." I can't hear the rest of the sentence as she turns her head away. After a minute or two more at the vista point for a photo, they are gone.

Some of the lightly-clad younger visitors leave almost immediately because of the cool wind and spray. They might stay longer if they knew that this is a healing place. Or some of them might not come to a sacred place at all. Yet here it is, in the midst of this rush of people. I want to come back to it as to something that quenches a thirst.

Several days later I am back. Again people come up the path to the vista point smiling, a childlike openness in their faces. Again the swelling in the chest. Yes, this is one of them, one visited by tens of thousands of people every year.

Yosemite has its cliffs and trails, its bears that make for good stories, its incomparable vistas, but this visit is about time and attentiveness. Time is visible here in the American West, if one takes the time to look.

Take the time!

The action of that living Something bursting through the veneer of the desert hides itself in falling waters and giant sequoias here in Yosemite. When we reach a sacred place, the membrane between now and that presence grows thin. The door swings. It doesn't take that much to slip through. Some time, some attention. Some people, some poets know this.

This is the first, wisest and wildest thing I know: that the soul exists, and is built entirely out of attentiveness.

More teaching than tree

Karen and I have just arrived at the parking lot by the gated entrance to Old

Big Oak Flat Road. A cream and brown walking stick, peeled smooth and leaning against a big Douglas fir nearby, beckons. We slip by the gate into the forest.

The air is cool for June, low to mid sixties, the sky patched with gray clouds. Bird sounds hang momentarily against the barely audible background hum of the forest. Fir and pine grow close and tall, shading the land, rooty fingers holding its steep slopes. The scent of damp fir rides pungent on a breeze. On the left side of the road the shoulder drops off quickly to the new, spring green of the valley bottom. The right shoulder rises more gradually into the somber shade of the big firs.

Soon the valley bottom drops out of sight. A black-hooded bird about the size of a sparrow, perhaps a dark-eyed junco, hops among pine needles 15 feet from the road. A few mosquitoes are gathering. Otherwise, silence settles in around us.

The road slants down, contouring the hillside. Karen examines the needles of a small pine reaching up on the right. Short needles growing from the branches in bunches of five mark it as a sugar pine. Two small groups of people come up the road toward us. The forest fades into the background as the first bubble of talk and movement envelops us. They pass. The second group approaches, four young women talking animatedly in French.

Silence rolls back in behind them. The sun peers down at our path. A faint trail comes down the slope on the right accompanied by a tiny creek ringing soft bells as it falls. I walk up the trail a little to sit and write. I would like to follow this trail to see where it leads. It doesn't show on my map.

Karen goes on ahead. I begin to slow down and look more closely at the citizens of the forest. I'm feeling deliciously surprised: There is no rush. I can sit here and study the plants at my leisure or go as slow as I want.

Brackens unfurl in this deep shade. Do they know one another? They all seem to be following the same signal.

Two bird calls slip unharmed through the trees, one rhythmic like a chicken's



clucking but more melodic and higher pitched. The other like somebody gargling or humming through a water pipe.

The wide-leaved thimbleberry bush is in bloom, each blossom with five white petals an inch and a half across.

Where are you, God?

The sun brightens instantly. Awareness rises; above is a blue-gray jigsaw pattern of clouds and sky. That clucking bird sounds again and the hum of the forest.

California dogwood thrive here in the shade of the big conifers. By now most of their spring blossoms are spent. The open arrangement of their branches and leaves lends a floating spaciousness to the understory. Little egg-shaped fungus varying from nipple-pink to flesh-colored to orange grow on a browned stump. One flattened bubble is red inside.

Feathery blue and purple blossom-clouds hover around the stem tops of a bush with small leaves. A lovely gold butterfly, one inch across from silvery wing tip blending to dark brown to silvery wing tip, fans her wings slowly on one of the purple clouds. A hulking bumblebee lumbers in and collides with the butterfly. She flutters away in drunken, ragged circles. In a minute she staggers back and lights a few feet away on a leaf. But then she catches a breeze and disappears before I can get close enough for a better look.

Still no sequoias, but now the road bends away from a big sugar pine with purplish, scaly brown bark. Neon green moss contrasts with the purple on its south side. At ground level, this tree is 12 feet across. Silvery gray sap has seeped from beneath the bark at the tree's base and dried. Native Americans and early settlers chewed gum like this for its piney sugar.

Before the first sequoia comes into view, you wonder if this or that large tree is one of the giants. But when you actually see the first one, you know it instantly. It is just off the road on the left and has a wooden platform around it to protect its roots from the constant stream of visitors. It is about twice the diameter of that sugar pine, so big that the mind instinctively shrinks it. Each gaze is a new surprise. The

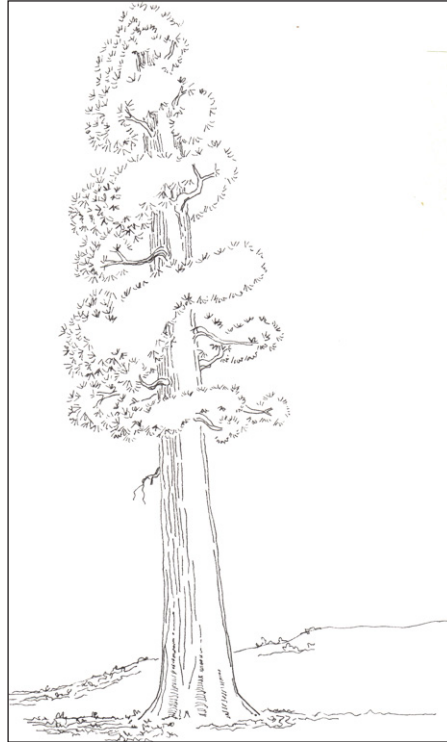


Illustration by Karen Cornell.

bark is bright cinnamon, like the cliffs of Zion, and thick, like a mat of soft, coconut-fibery hair. Blackened marks on one side give the impression of an ancient face, very slow moving, surrounded by a court of dogwoods.

I hesitate to call this being wood or tree because it reaches beyond the utility that those words connote. It is more teaching than tree. Sculpted with scars and age, it has palpable, living presence. It is grand.

This one is over 2000 years old, by the forest service's best estimate. The sequoias are the largest living beings on earth, but one doesn't need the help of researched facts to feel respect and awe. And gratitude that a few of these giants of the past are still here with us.

Its ancestors lived 150 million years ago on this continent in vast forests. Today they are native nowhere else but in a scattering of groves on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada. This one was already mature when the first European settlers came to this hemisphere. It was an adult during the last days of the Roman Empire.

Across the road and up the trail into

the Tuolumne Grove is the remains of the Dead Giant, a stump about 20 feet high. Its base measures 29 feet at ground level. Having paced off that diameter myself, still I question it. My imagination fails to reconcile its dimensions with those of a familiar point of reference. My living room, for example, which measures 20 by 18 1/2, would fit easily inside the base of this tree!

Several people can walk abreast through the tunnel cut in the Dead Giant. Every inch of the tunnel is packed with human initials and dates: Walter Cady, JM Schafern, M. Adams, 1886, '74, '92. Some of the letters were formed with nail holes. I feel slightly relieved to read that this tree was already a stump when the tunnel was cut in 1878. The carvers have defaced it, but at least it was already dead when they tried to associate themselves with some of its grandeur.

A little stream runs through the grove, which has about 25 mature sequoias in an open forest. The park service has fenced off the biggest trees to prevent soil compaction. One does want to get close to them.

Non-humans have also carved into the wood of the big trees. Several black carpenter ants pause near router-like paths made by their colony in one fallen giant. You can walk upright inside the hollow trunk of this one. Piles of bark tufts, orange brown, soft enough for pillows, lie on the ground. Mountain misery covers the ground with its strawberry-like blossom, curling white petals around a gold center, and beautiful symmetrical leaf.

A chipmunk with a short tail sits alert on a small log in the sunshine. Its head is the color of sequoia bark. Two sets of stripes, black-white-black, run from its neck down its gray back and sides. It dashes away when I make a clicking sound. I glance away. It is back on the log when I look a few seconds later. Now it is gone again! Now it's back, same log.

This fellow likes that log. It appears to be listening to some other clicking off to my right.

It's quiet here. Just the cricket hum of the forest and the sound of the stream. My awareness feels spread out beyond my skin. "Holy Art Thou" is playing inside me.



The composition of Savitri

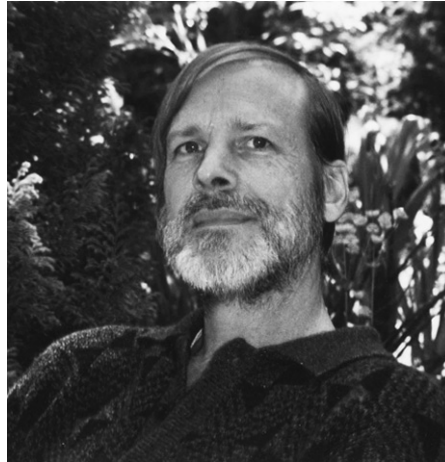
by Richard Hartz

Author's note: This study of the process of Sri Aurobindo's writing of Savitri began to appear in Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture in October 1999. Its publication continued without interruption for fifty instalments. In November 2003, due to the pressure of other work, the writer was compelled to suspend the series for the time being. These articles were intended in the beginning to be merely a rewritten presentation of a talk given at the Savitri Bhavan, Auroville, on 15 November 1998. Initially it was thought that the substance of that talk might be expanded into three or four articles. However, it was gradually found that the subject deserved a deeper and more extensive treatment. Being written serially, month by month, the plan as well as the scope of the study underwent considerable changes which had not been foreseen at the outset. At present it is not known when it will be resumed or how long it will take to complete.

Editor's note: The present version has been condensed and rearranged based on that which appeared in Mother India. Part 1, which is presented in this issue, gives an overview of the composition of Savitri. It is essentially the same as that published in Mother India at the start of the series. Part 2, which discusses in greater depth and detail the composition of specific books, has been compiled by the editor of Collaboration based on a selection of material from the original series of articles. It will be published in the next issue of Collaboration.

Part 1

The story of the composition of *Savitri* is almost an epic in itself. Much work will have to be done before this story can be told in detail. For now only a broad overview can be given, tracing the development of a few passages



as examples. But even this should enrich our understanding of the poem.

Sri Aurobindo's own statements on how he wrote *Savitri* can be found in "Letters on Savitri", especially the first section. Another source of information is *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*. Certain facts about how the work on the poem proceeded in the later years are known only from Nirodbaran's recollections as recorded in that book. Amal Kiran has also written on the subject and has published Sri Aurobindo's first fair copy of the earliest version (1916), as well as the opening sections of the 1936-37 version (*Mother India*, August 1981 to February 1982 and November 1982 to February 1983). All these are invaluable sources for anyone interested in knowing how *Savitri* took shape.

More recently, work on *Savitri* has been undertaken by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives. At first, the early manuscripts were not the immediate subject of interest. The principal aim was to verify the published text by comparing it line by line with Sri Aurobindo's final manuscripts and dictation. It was discovered that his lines had not always been copied, typed and printed accurately. In 1993, under the editorship of Nirodbaran and Amal Kiran, a new edition was published. Words and lines found to have been accidentally altered were restored to what Sri Aurobindo had written or dictated.

Meanwhile, a study of the history of the composition of *Savitri* was begun. Thousands of pages of manuscripts have now been arranged in a preliminary

chronological order and are being systematically transcribed. The "Note on the Text" at the end of Volume 34 of the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (1997) outlines our knowledge at this initial stage. I will summarise what has already been published, add further details, and give some examples of the changes *Savitri* underwent in the course of Sri Aurobindo's untiring search for the highest inspiration that can be expressed in human speech.

Three Phases

There were three major phases in the composition of *Savitri*. The first was from 1916 to about 1920. During this period, the original narrative poem grew in length and complexity as well as in depth of meaning, but did not yet turn into a full fledged epic.

The second phase extended from sometime before 1930 to 1945. Sri Aurobindo now considered *Savitri* his major literary work. He concentrated on what became Part One, greatly increasing the role of Aswapati and the element of Yogic experience and spiritual and philosophical vision in the scope of the poem.

Then in the last five years, from 1945 or '46 to 1950, he returned to the later parts. He revised what he had already written and added much new material, including several cantos on Savitri's Yoga.

The first phase is clearly distinct from the others. There was a gap of several years in the 1920s when Sri Aurobindo almost stopped all writing, including *Savitri*. He was totally absorbed in his inner work, culminating in his *siddhi* in November 1926. When he returned to *Savitri*, it was in order to express through poetry a higher consciousness than he had realised before 1920.

In a letter of 1931, Sri Aurobindo wrote that he had "started recasting" *Savitri*. In this and other letters of the 1930s, he refers to his preoccupation with the "first book". That is also what we see from the manuscripts: that for fifteen years or so he worked mainly on what is now Part One (previously Book One). This is the second major phase, focussed on Part One.



At first Sri Aurobindo worked on *Savitri* as a whole, but it was an early version which in many ways was quite different from the poem we know. Later he took the relatively short opening passage of that version and expanded it over a period of about fifteen years into Part One, which now constitutes half of the poem.

Then in the last five years, besides giving the finishing touches to Part One, he went back to the rest of the poem and revised it—largely by dictation, because by that time his eyesight was failing, so that most of the work in the last four or five years, and all of it after 1947, was done by dictation. In this last period he worked extensively on Parts Two and Three. He went through the books of these two parts in an order I will describe, reworking and expanding them. He also added a book on the Yoga of Savitri, which was introduced into the scheme of the poem only in 1947.

The following extract from one of Sri Aurobindo's letters gives an idea of why it took him more than thirty years to finish *Savitri*. It also gives a glimpse of his extraordinary humility:

...if I have not poetical genius, at least I can claim a sufficient, if not an infinite capacity for painstaking; that I have sufficiently shown by my long labour on *Savitri*. Or rather, since it was not labour in the ordinary sense, not a labour of painstaking construction, I may describe it as an infinite capacity for waiting and listening for the true inspiration and rejecting all that fell short of it, however good it might seem from a lower standard, until I got that which I felt to be absolutely right. (*Savitri*, 1993, p. 801)

So this is what Sri Aurobindo was doing with *Savitri* during all the time that he worked on it between 1916 and 1950:

listening for the true inspiration until every line was absolutely right.

Dating the versions

Let us go back to the beginning. First of all, I should mention the idea that Sri Aurobindo began *Savitri* in Baroda. This is a widespread impression. It is based on the reminiscences of Dinendra Kumar Roy who, while staying with Sri Aurobindo in Baroda in 1898-99 to help him master Bengali, reportedly saw him writing an English poem based on the legend of Savitri and Satyavan. But no such manuscript from that period has survived. Sri Aurobindo also never gave the impression that he had begun *Savitri* in Baroda. All his references to early versions seem to

So this is what Sri Aurobindo was doing with Savitri during all the time that he worked on it between 1916 and 1950: listening for the true inspiration until every line was absolutely right.

refer to Pondicherry.

It is not impossible that he translated the Savitri episode of the Mahabharata in Baroda, during a period when he did many translations from Sanskrit. If so, the translation was lost. Or Dinendra Kumar Roy may have simply confused *Love and Death*, written in 1899, with *Savitri*. *Love and Death* is based on the Ruru-Pramadvara episode in the Mahabharata, which resembles the better-known story of Savitri and Satyavan.

In any case, if Sri Aurobindo wrote a poem on Savitri in Baroda, it must have been quite different from even the earliest version we have from Pondicherry. The first known manuscript of *Savitri* contains, if only in an embryonic form, most of the main elements of the epic as it later developed. It seems unlikely that anything Sri Aurobindo might have written in Baroda before he took up Yoga could have provided an adequate framework for elaborating throughout the later part of his life as the central vehicle of his spiritual message.

For all practical purposes, then, the composition of *Savitri* begins in 1916. Moreover, this is one of the few places where we can give exact dates. The first manuscript is dated, on the second page, "August 8th 9th / 1916". More dates follow, up to November. After that, Sri Aurobindo stopped dating the manuscripts of *Savitri* for a long time. So it won't be possible to give much of a chronology until the next landmark, which comes in 1936. The passages sent to Amal in 1936 and '37 are dated.

The next dates are in 1942 and 1944, when Sri Aurobindo dated his manuscripts of Part One as it approached completion. Then we have a few dates in 1946 and '47. These are usually not from the manuscripts themselves, but from Sri Aurobindo's letters dictated in those years. From these we can tell where he was in the composition of *Savitri*. Finally, near the end we have some idea of the dating, based largely on

Nirod's recollections.

The first manuscript

Fortunately, the first manuscript is dated near the beginning. The dates given are 8 9 August 1916. Sri Aurobindo apparently started *Savitri* during a break after completing an issue of the *Arya*. 15 August 1916 marked the beginning of the third year of the *Arya*. Since 1914, most of Sri Aurobindo's writing had gone into the *Arya*, in which he published his major prose works in monthly instalments, writing several of them at a time. In the August 1916 issue—supposed to come out on the 15th, so it must have gone to press a little earlier—he began two new series, *Essays on the Gita* and *The Psychology of Social Development* (later renamed *The Human Cycle*), besides continuing *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *Hymns of the Atris*. That was a lot of work since the previous issue, only



a month earlier! Anyone else would have collapsed, but Sri Aurobindo relaxed by writing some poetry. He took up the story of Savitri and wrote a few pages of blank verse in a small bound notebook he had last used for an essay in Bengali on the Rigveda.

At first he may have spent only a couple of days on *Savitri*. He wrote three or four pages, a hundred lines or so, with the date August 9th repeated at the end. Then there is a break, followed by a much longer passage. This starts again at the beginning and continues as far as Savitri's debate with Death, telling almost the whole story. At some point—perhaps where there is the break and new beginning in the manuscript—Sri Aurobindo must have set the poem aside and taken it up again, because the next dates that occur after August 8th 9th are October 17th 18th. They appear at the bottom of the page preceding the death of Satyavan; the pair of dates may mean that the passage was written on the 17th and revised on the 18th. October 17th is repeated a few pages later, October 18th twice further on, and October 18th-19th at the end of the long passage.

On these two or three days Sri Aurobindo wrote over 400 lines, his first draft of much of the present Books Eight and Nine and part of Book Ten. He must have written at least 150 lines a day in an unusual outburst of inspiration. Moreover, when what he wrote on these days is compared with the final version, several passages are found to have remained almost intact through all subsequent revision.

Sri Aurobindo would later refer to “the old insufficient inspiration” of the early versions of *Savitri*, compared with the level he came to insist on maintaining. But exceptions to this general “insufficiency” (judged by his standards) were not infrequent. Perhaps the earlier lines tended to be lacking in what he termed “overhead” inspiration. But they often expressed an intensity of exalted feeling that could hardly be surpassed in its own kind. And in many places—especially some of the speeches in the middle and later parts of the poem—this was exactly what was needed. Sri Aurobindo often left his old

lines unchanged when he revised these passages after thirty years.

The first draft stops after Savitri's debate with Death. It is followed by new versions of some passages that had already been written. Near the end of the notebook, there is a passage of about a hundred lines in which the Godhead speaks to Savitri after her victory over Death. It begins:

Because thou hast rejected my great
calm
I lay upon thy neck my mighty yoke
And hold thee without refuge from
my will.
Now will I do by thee my glorious
works
Giving thee for reward and punish-
ment
Myself in thee a sweetness and a
scourge.
Unsheltered by dividing walls of
mind,
Naked of ignorance' protecting veil
And without covert from my radiant
gods
Thou shalt be hunted through the
world by love.
No form shall screen thee from
divine desire,
Nowhere shalt thou escape my living
eyes.

After this, the line “For ever love, O beautiful slave of God” was written, but crossed out and shifted to the next page.

These remarkable lines are not very different from lines in the present Book Eleven; some are identical. It must have been in November 1916 that Sri Aurobindo, in a flood of inspiration, wrote this passage which foreshadows the powerful climax of the future epic.

Expansion and division

In its earliest form, *Savitri* was not much longer than *Love and Death*, Sri Aurobindo's youthful narrative poem on a related theme. Like *Love and Death*, it was not divided into books or cantos, but only into sections separated by blank spaces.

As the poem grew, these sections were replaced by numbered divisions with significant names. In the course of time the structure became more and more elaborate. A glance at this development will provide an overview of the main stages in the composition of *Savitri*.

Let us begin with a more precise idea of the poem's original length and how much it later expanded. It will be useful to refer to an early version that has been transcribed and published. “Sri Aurobindo's First Fair Copy of His Earliest Version of *Savitri*” appeared in *Mother India* in 1981-82, with line-numbers that are convenient for our purpose. This version, from the end of 1916, is 1637 lines long. As now printed, *Savitri* has 23,837 lines. This is nearly fifteen times what it was in the beginning.

It did not expand evenly all through. Certain passages grew enormously, others very little. Hundreds of pages of new matter were accommodated in a massive evolving structure. Yet in some ways this structure remained surprisingly faithful to the original design.

The opening sections of the “first fair copy” consist of 98 lines covering roughly what is now “The Symbol Dawn” (Book One, Canto One) and “The Vision and the Boon” (Book Three, Canto Four), with a short connecting passage. These lines were ultimately replaced by the present Part One, which has 11,683 lines. This means that the beginning of the poem—what precedes the birth of Savitri—increased to approximately 120 times what it was in 1916.

On the other hand, what is now the Book of Death is not much longer than the equivalent passage of 133 lines in the first fair copy. In the final version it is 177 lines. And even of the 133 original lines, 108 were identical to what they are now. This means that Sri Aurobindo later changed only 25 lines and added 44. So this passage remains very similar to what it was in 1916. In this case, it may not be because in 1950 Sri Aurobindo found it impossible to improve upon what he had written so many years earlier. It seems that he left the Book of Death aside with the intention of



returning to it, but never did so. We know this from what Nirod has told us about the last work on *Savitri*, shortly before Sri Aurobindo's passing.

But there are some passages which Sri Aurobindo worked on seriously in the late 1940s, without changing them drastically from what they were in 1916. Book Nine, "The Book of Eternal Night", is a notable instance. Having worked on it early in the period between 1916 and 1920, Sri Aurobindo again gave it full attention around 1946. The revision was substantial, but only increased the length of Book Nine to about twice that of the corresponding sections in 1916. Book Ten, Canto Four, on the other hand, grew to something like eighteen times the length of the passage from which it started. This gives an idea of how much some passages expanded, while others remained similar to what they were from the beginning.

Even in passages that were altered almost beyond recognition through decades of rewriting, we do find lines where in the very first drafts Sri Aurobindo struck upon the perfect expression and never found any need to change it later on. In the opening of the 1916 version, which eventually grew into Part One, there are five or six such lines:

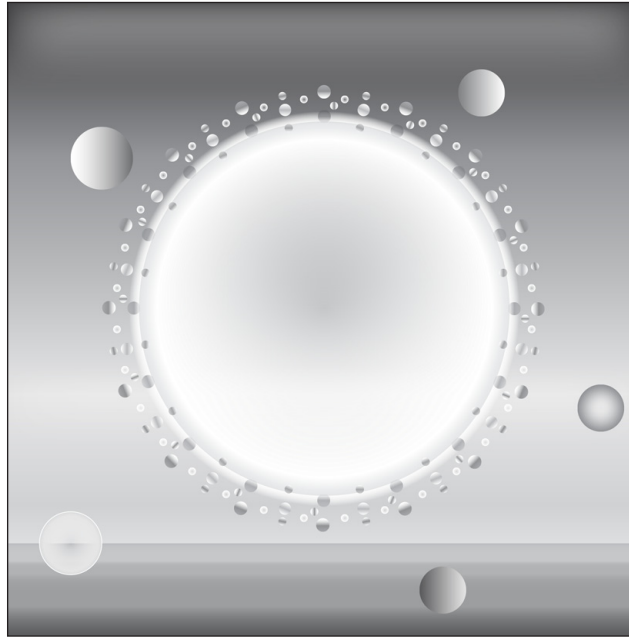
This was the day when Satyavan
must die.

Like a tired god into mysterious seas.

His soul drew back into the speed
and noise
Of the vast business of created
things.

...the thoughts that skim the fathom-
less surge
Of Nature and wing back to hidden
shores.

That is, of the 11,683 lines of the



Particles of Oneness. (Graphic art by Margaret Phanes)

present Part One, these can be traced back unchanged to 1916, where they were exactly the same. Another 20 lines are quite similar, sometimes differing by only a word or two. The rest is almost entirely new. Much of it was written in the 1930s and early 1940s, when Sri Aurobindo was concentrating on the Yoga of the King and the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds.

It was only gradually that he discovered the potential of *Savitri* for expressing occult and spiritual experience. This is the fundamental difference between the content of the original poem and the epic as we know it. Just as in the early versions there was virtually no Yoga of Aswapati, likewise Savitri's Yoga was not part of the conception of the poem until quite late in its formation. Except for its first canto, the Book of Yoga was added only in 1947, three years before the completion of *Savitri*.

Early "Books" and "Cantos"

It is instructive to see how the original continuous narrative poem was gradually divided and subdivided, ultimately into three Parts, twelve Books and forty nine Cantos. This development of a complex structure out of a simple one reflects a vast change in the conception and scope

of the poem. Yet the continuity through all modifications is equally striking.

The simplest division appeared in the first fair copy. This was a division into "Book I" and "Book II", with no titles. These "Books" had no connection with the Books of the epic as we know it, but corresponded to what are now called Parts. And since originally there was only a short prologue representing what is now Part One, the original "Book I" and "Book II" corresponded practically to what are now Part Two and Part Three.

This division, which is dropped in the next stage, reappears later in a division of the poem into two parts called "Earth" and "Beyond". This persists until the early 1940s. The titles "Earth"

and "Beyond" are significant, though they disappear in the final scheme which has three Parts instead of two. Earth and the Beyond are the two planes of reality, physical and supraphysical, whose interaction is necessary for the divine consummation in the material world envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. In terms of the story of Savitri, "Earth" included the events leading up to the death of Satyavan; "Beyond" referred to the passage through other worlds forming a symbolic background for Savitri's struggle with the forces of denial represented by Death.

The next stage brings out this symbolism more clearly. Sri Aurobindo now divided the poem into six cantos and an epilogue, giving names to the cantos. These names correspond to those of several of the later "books". They are: "Love", "Fate", "Death", "Night", "Twilight" and "Day".

The previous twofold division is no longer explicit, but is still implied and will soon re-emerge. For Love, Fate and Death represent the principal elements, positive and negative, of the problem of earthly life as it is confronted in the poem; Night, Twilight and Day symbolise fundamental aspects of existence, from the Inconscient to the Superconscient, which are largely



beyond our normal experience, but have to be taken into account in order to arrive at a solution.

The title of the first canto, “Love”, resembles that of the present Book Five, “The Book of Love”. But in those days the opening passage was so short that “Love” also included what eventually went into Books One to Four. The canto called “Fate” corresponded to what is now Book Six, “The Book of Fate”; but mainly to Book Six, Canto One, the dramatic scene in which Narad discloses the fate of Satyavan. Most of the more philosophical matter in Book Six, Canto Two, “The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain”, was introduced much later. “Death” included the year leading up to Satyavan’s death, as now described in Book Seven, Canto One, as well as the fateful day narrated in the present Book Eight, “The Book of Death”. The other cantos, “Night”, “Twilight” and “Day”, corresponded to the later Books Nine to Eleven: “The Book of Eternal Night”, “The Book of the Double Twilight” and “The Book of Everlasting Day”. The poem ended with an Epilogue, as it does now. In fact, the Epilogue has remained quite similar to what it was then.

There are four manuscripts of the first canto, “Love”. But there are only two of the third canto, “Death”, and two of the Epilogue. There are more than four manuscripts of some other cantos. Sri Aurobindo was evidently beginning to work separately on different sections of the poem, rather than writing it all out from beginning to end each time.

The next stage has the same divisions, but now they are termed “books” instead of “cantos”. “Book I” is “Love”; the other titles, also, are those of the previous “cantos”. There is at least a partial manuscript of each of these books, but Sri Aurobindo does not seem to have written them in sequence or finished a new version of the whole poem in this form. We find a complete “Book II: Fate”, a complete “Book IV: Night”, and so on; but a complete “Book III: Death” does not exist. The manuscript headed “Book III: Death” is half-finished. Sri Aurobindo revised this in the late 1940s and turned it into Book Seven, Canto One. But it stops before the beginning of what is

now the Book of Death. When he eventually did some work on the present Book of Death, Sri Aurobindo had to take an old “Canto III” as his starting-point, because there was no “Book III” containing that passage.

The evolution of the opening

Up to this point, Sri Aurobindo’s work on *Savitri* has already been extensive, but has not been equally distributed over the various sections of the poem. This inequality will increase as time goes on, with some passages receiving immensely more attention than others. The passage with the largest number of manuscript versions—almost fifty—is the opening. It is a good example of how *Savitri* changed over the years.

The “first fair copy” began like this:

In a huge forest where the listening
Night
Heard lonely voices and in the large
hush
Was conscious of the sigh and tread
of things
That have no sound for the rich heart
of day,—
For now her phantom tribes were
not abroad,
The panther’s eyes glared not, the
tiger slept
Prone in his lair of jungle or deep
grass,—
Startling the wide browed dreamer
Dawn arose.
Lain in her darker thoughtful sister’s
robe
She pushed away the loving cloak
that sealed
To rest her brilliant and imperious
eyes
And waved the dim kind guardian
from her side.

There is not a single line in this that resembles any line in *Savitri* as we know it. What is in common is only the idea of starting the poem with a description of the dawn of the day of Satyavan’s death. But at the end of the passage we have the line:

This was the day when Suthyavan
must die.

This line was there from the very beginning, and it is the only line in this passage that has passed without change (apart from the spelling of Satyavan’s name) into the final version. But a few lines were similar; for example, one just after the passage I have quoted:

Raised were the wonderful lids that
open heaven.

Later this became

Parted the eternal lids that open
heaven.

Further on we find:

Once she half-looked behind for her
great sun,
Then thoughtful turned to her im-
mortal work.

Later, “great” became “veiled” and “turned” became “went”, but otherwise these lines have remained intact. Then, in the description of *Savitri* waking on that day, we have:

Sighing she laid her hand upon her
bosom,
Nor knew why the close lingering
ache was there,
So quiet, so old, so natural to its
place.

This has changed somewhat in the final version, but substantially it is the same. A few lines below comes:

Daily oblation of her unwept tears.

The preceding lines have been completely rewritten, but this line has remained as it was, with only the addition of a “The” at the beginning.

For six or seven manuscripts, the opening remains similar to this. The last version of “Canto One: Love” starts a little differently:



In a dense forest under moonless
skies....

With “moonless”, it begins to come nearer to the feeling of the later versions. “Moonless” may have suggested “starless” in the line that begins the next manuscript. But now the atmosphere is suddenly quite different:

A starless hush prepared epiphany.
Near was the hour of the transfiguring gods.

And so on. This change came when Sri Aurobindo substituted the heading “Book I” for “Canto I”. At this stage the opening passage becomes entirely different and starts to look more like *Savitri* as we know it. In fact, almost the whole opening has been replaced by something new. It continues:

Night lost below in leaves, on high
enshrined
In her own mantle of immensity
Waiting upon the marge of silence
sat
Mute with the expectation of her
change.

These lines, except for the first, remained in some form for a long time, though some of them were eventually changed beyond recognition or discarded completely.

The line that comes second in this version, “Near was the hour of the transfiguring gods”, was shifted to the beginning after some time. And having become the opening line, it appeared again in slightly altered forms—first:

The hour was near of the transfiguring
gods.

Then

It was an hour of the transfiguring
gods.

Here Sri Aurobindo has put the words “It was” at the beginning. This remains through several manuscripts. Then we have:

It was the hush of a transfiguring
hour.

This is followed by something rather different:

It was the moment when the gods
awake.

But Sri Aurobindo changed “moment when” to “hour before” and the line became:

It was the hour before the gods
awake.

So here, in the twenty-first version of the opening passage, we have the first line in its final form. Sri Aurobindo went on enlarging and perfecting the opening of *Savitri* through some two dozen more manuscripts. But apart from capitalising “gods”, he did not again change the first line.

“A tale and a vision”

We have seen how *Savitri* developed gradually from the earliest versions which opened “In a huge forest...” to those beginning “A starless hush prepared epiphany”, and through another dozen or so drafts of the opening until the first line arrived at its present form. During most of the later stage of this process, the first portion of the poem was no longer called “Love”, but “Quest”.

Soon after changing the six “cantos” to six “books”, Sri Aurobindo had divided the rapidly growing first book into two. “Book I” was renamed “Quest”, for it now ended with Savitri travelling through the land in search of her destined life-companion. “Love” was kept as the title of the second book, devoted entirely to the meeting of Savitri and Satyavan. Thus the poem consisted of seven books—called Quest, Love, Fate, Death, Night, Twilight and Day—and an epilogue.

Sixteen complete or incomplete versions of “Book I: Quest” have been found among the manuscripts of *Savitri*. In the fourth of these, Sri Aurobindo reintro-

duced the division of the poem into two parts, calling them “Earth” and “Beyond”. Below the title “Savithri” (as he then spelled it), he added a subtitle: “A Tale and a Vision”.

In a letter of 1936, he referred to the scheme of parts and books found in “Savithri: A Tale and a Vision”:

Savitri was originally written many years ago before the Mother came, as a narrative poem in two parts, Part I Earth and Part II Beyond... each of four books—or rather Part II consisted of three books and an epilogue (*Savitri*, 1993, p. 729).

This helps us to date the first phase of Sri Aurobindo’s work on *Savitri*. “Before the Mother came” cannot mean before her first arrival in Pondicherry in 1914, it can only mean before she came to stay in 1920. Even if we suppose that the earliest surviving manuscript of *Savitri*, dated 1916, was preceded by others that have been lost, the mention of two parts and several books shows that Sri Aurobindo was referring to a more advanced stage than the 1916 version, which had no such divisions. He has simplified the story of the genesis of the poem by leaving out the numerous drafts through which it reached the form of seven books and an epilogue. But the statement makes it clear that the early phase of work on *Savitri*, whose outcome is represented by manuscripts subtitled “A Tale and a Vision”, came to an end by about 1920.

“A Legend and a Symbol”

In January 1921, Sri Aurobindo discontinued the *Arya*. After six years of one of the most astonishing and momentous outbursts of literary activity in the history of thought, he abruptly stopped writing for an equal period. From 1921 to 1926, he suspended work on *Savitri* along with virtually all other writing. But this long silence, far from being an interval of sterile inactivity, was a time of intense concentration and ascent to heights hardly glimpsed in the past evolution of the human consciousness. Sri Aurobindo’s experiences



and realisations during this period made possible the next phase in the composition of *Savitri*.

When he began to write again, his first book was *The Mother*, written and published in 1927. A few pages of *Savitri* are found in a notebook used for drafts of *The Mother*. But Sri Aurobindo's renewed attention to the poem may have been quite intermittent at first. In a letter of 1931, which provides the next datable evidence of his resumption of work on *Savitri*, he speaks of looking at it "once a month perhaps". But he also reveals a fundamental change in his conception of it:

There is a previous draft, the result of the many retouchings of which somebody told you; but in that form it would not have been a "magnum opus" at all. Besides, it would have been a legend and not a symbol. I therefore started recasting the whole thing; only the best passages and lines of the old draft will remain, altered so as to fit into the new frame. (*Savitri*, 1993, p. 727)

During the 1930s, a heavy load of correspondence and other preoccupations, such as the revision of the writings published previously in the *Arya*, limited the amount of time Sri Aurobindo could give to *Savitri*. Nevertheless, he filled notebook after notebook with drafts of the first book. Even a glance through these notebooks gives an impression of his Herculean labor to lift the poem to the highest attainable levels of inspired and revelatory utterance.

Initially, the first book was still called "Quest". But Sri Aurobindo was increasingly preoccupied with the introductory sections, especially the description of Aswapati's Yoga and vision of the Divine Mother. As these sections expanded, the first book became disproportionately long. He did not yet create a new book

with Aswapati as its central figure. But he reduced the excessive length of the first book by shifting material from the end of it to the second book.

The last manuscript titled "Quest" (a medium-sized notebook in which Sri Aurobindo was writing 21 lines on a page, before revision) begins with a four page section corresponding to the present opening canto, followed by a section of twenty pages or so which would develop eventually into the rest of Book One and Book Three—as yet there was hardly even a hint of Book Two, the longest book of the finished epic. Then come three sections of about ten pages each, covering the subject matter of the present Book Four, "The Book of Birth and Quest". The sections had no titles, but were separated by blank spaces.

...he filled notebook after notebook with drafts of the first book. Even a glance through these notebooks gives an impression of his Herculean labor to lift the poem to the highest attainable levels of inspired and revelatory utterance.

When Sri Aurobindo revised this manuscript, he marked the last section to be transferred to the next book. But this meant shifting *Savitri*'s quest from the first book to the second, so the first book could no longer be called "Quest". Accordingly, at the beginning of the next manuscript we find a new title, "The Book of Birth". Besides substituting "Birth" for "Quest", Sri Aurobindo included the word "Book" in the title, as he would do henceforth in the titles of all books of *Savitri*.

Apart from this change in the form of the titles, the scheme of the poem was not affected much by starting with "The Book of Birth" instead of with "Quest". The transfer of material left the number of books the same, only adjusting a disproportion between their lengths. But the new title of the first book marked a break with the old poem that had been subtitled "A Tale and a Vision". The rewriting of the first book was transforming *Savitri* into

an epic of a kind unknown in the world's literature, with a more far-reaching significance than Sri Aurobindo had contemplated when he began.

One of the next manuscripts has a title page on which he put for the first time, under "Savitri", the subtitle "A Legend and a Symbol". Below this, a table of contents listed the four books of "Part I" as it was then conceived: "The Book of Birth", "The Book of Love", "The Book of Fate", "The Book of Death". Sri Aurobindo perhaps thought it was time to write out at least this much of the poem in order to get an overview of it as it then stood.

But this was not to be. The notebook in question is filled with drafts for "The Book of Birth". Sri Aurobindo got as far as the vision of the Divine Mother. Then he went back to the beginning of the Yoga of the King, rewriting and thoroughly revising the first page four times in succession before continuing. At this point, in the early 1930s, so much work remained to be done on this part of *Savitri* that it would

be years before the later books, lying almost untouched since 1920, could be taken up again.

The Worlds

In the manuscript of "The Book of Birth" just described, where "A Legend and a Symbol" first appeared below "Savitri" on the title page, we find the following passage:

A voyager upon uncharted routes,
Venturing into another space and
time,
He faced the viewless danger of the
Unknown
And traversed the ambush of the op-
ponent Snake
And saw in front the flaming hier-
archies
And the tiered planes and the im-
mutable Lords.



This sentence ultimately came to be spread out over more than two hundred pages of *Savitri*, from page 91 to page 300 in the current edition. The first three lines were transposed and altered into the four lines that form the last sentence of the present Book One:

A voyager upon uncharted routes
Fronting the viewless danger of the
Unknown,
Adventuring across enormous
realms,
He broke into another Space and
Time.

The last two lines of the six-line passage from “The Book of Birth” are now found almost at the end of Book Two—the first line slightly modified and followed by two new lines:

Above him he saw the flaming Hier-
archies,
The wings that fold around created
Space,
The sun eyed Guardians and the
golden Sphinx
And the tiered planes and the im-
mutable Lords.

Today, 14 cantos intervene between these two passages. In the manuscript described above, there was a single line. In the final version, this line comes at the end of a sentence in Book Two, Canto Eight (p. 230):

In vague tremendous passages of
Doom
He heard the goblin Voice that
guides to slay,
And faced the enchantments of the
demon Sign,
And traversed the ambush of the op-
ponent Snake.

The line about “the opponent Snake” and some lines on the Overmind, now found on the last pages of Book Two, were the starting-point for a veritable explosion of visionary poetry which by the early 1940s had produced “The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds”. It was a literary

repetition, as it were, of the primal event

When worlds broke forth like clus-
ters of fire flowers,
And great burning thoughts voyaged
through the sky of mind....
(*Savitri*, 1993, p. 612)

The detonation-point can be seen in the next manuscript, on a page which presents a remarkable appearance even compared with other pages of the *Savitri* manuscripts of this period. The page is large, for the ruled notebook Sri Aurobindo was using allowed him to write 38 lines on a page before revision. But more than half of what is written on this page is found in the margins and between the lines.

Almost all the new lines relate to what is now “The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds”. Even among the 38 lines written before the marginal revision began, we find the following in place of the last three lines of the passage quoted above from the previous version:

Across that subtle Matter’s reign he
passed
Which holds the types of things our
world attempts,
And through the astral chaos built
his road,
Across the illusions of the demon
Kings;
Assaults of Hell he endured and
Titan strokes,
Bore the fierce inner wounds that are
slow to heal,
And traversed the ambush of the op-
ponent Snake,
In shining Edens of the vital gods
And scenes forbidden to our pallid
sense
Rejoiced, where life is beautiful,
proud and free,
And wandered in stupendous realms
of Mind,
The borders of the inexpressible
Light,
And saw in front the flaming hier-
archies
And the tiered planes and the im-
mutable Lords.

In this fourteen-line sentence, several of the worlds through which Aswapati travels in the fifteen cantos of the final Book Two are already very briefly indicated. The cantos later called “The Kingdom of Subtle Matter”, “The Godheads of the Little Life”, “The World of Falsehood” and “The Paradise of the Life-Gods” are represented by two or three lines each, while the passage that would evolve into “The Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge” continues with several more lines at the bottom of this page and the top of the next.

But this only opened the floodgates for what now began to descend. The lines jotted in the top, left and right margins of this page show the beginning of the process. At the end of the same notebook, Sri Aurobindo began to write out entire pages describing some of these worlds. By 1936, when for the first time in twenty years we have a precisely datable version, this section of the poem had reached a length of many hundreds of lines.

The 1936-37 Version

Towards the end of 1936, Sri Aurobindo began sending passages from *Savitri* to Amal Kiran. Two lines he had quoted earlier had whetted Amal’s appetite for more. In 1933, the young poet-disciple’s pleas for a glimpse of the poem had stimulated Sri Aurobindo’s work on it, but failed to elicit quotations. Sri Aurobindo had only written:

Anyhow in the effort to quote I have succeeded in putting the first few hundred lines into something like a final form—which is a surprising progress and very gratifying to me even if it brings no immediate satisfaction to you.

Early in October 1936, Amal sent this reminder:

I wonder if you realise how passionately I long to be in contact with the visions and vibrations that are the stuff of your highest poetry. Of course, anything you have written



will be most welcome, but to get quotations from “Savitri”, if not all of it, is the top of my aspiration.

Sri Aurobindo replied with characteristic humour:

Well, I tried to do it—but the condition of timelessness = not enough time to do anything in which I am and have been for a long time, made it impossible. My box is full of things that ought to be done and are not done and, the box being insufficient, they are trailing all over the table and everywhere else....

Finally, on 25 October 1936, Sri Aurobindo sent the first sixteen lines of the opening, as it then stood, to his eager disciple. Amal responded with elation:

The beauty of what you have sent may move one to utterance but the wideness takes one's breath away. I read the lines over and over again. I am somewhat stunned by the magnitude and memorableness of this day....

Sri Aurobindo continued to send the poem to Amal in daily instalments. On the 3rd of November, he came to a long description of the heroine, including the lines:

As in a mystic and dynamic dance
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies,
Inspired and ruled from Truth's
 revealing vault,
Moves in some prophet cavern of the
 Gods,
A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple door to things
 beyond.

Amal was ecstatic:

I am seized, lifted, hurled, broken to smithereens of rapture! Your passage

is the greatest thing in poetry I have ever read. What a flight!—nobody can describe so marvellously our Mother. Isn't Savitri she and she only?

Sri Aurobindo answered simply:

Savitri is represented in the poem as an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

The correspondence continued in this way for almost a month without a break. After an interruption, it was resumed from 5 to 20 January 1937. In all, over a thousand lines were sent. Amal typed them out and Sri Aurobindo touched them up, replying also to specific questions about words and lines or general questions of technique and inspiration. The incomplete version so produced represents roughly the mid-point in the evolution of *Savitri*. It has been published in *Mother India* (November 1982 to February 1983) under the title “The Opening Sections of the 1936-37 Version of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*”.

The word “section” has a precise significance at this stage. It must be understood in order to know what Sri Aurobindo means when he refers to the first four sections in letters of 1936-38. He explained at the outset (26.10.1936):

This First Book is divided into sections and the larger sections into subsections.... The first section is “The last Dawn”, i.e., the dawn of the day of Satyavan's death, (but it must be remembered that everything is symbolic or significant in the poem, so this dawn also,) the next is “The Issue”; both of these are short. Then comes a huge section of the Yoga of the Lord of the Horse (Aswapati, father of Savitri) relating how came about the birth of Savitri and its significance; finally the birth and childhood of Savitri.

The numbers and titles of the sections were written in the left margin rather than as headings. Later, when “cantos” replaced “sections” as the units into which books

were divided, “The last Dawn” would become “The Symbol Dawn”. “The Issue” would remain as the next title; Sri Aurobindo explained on 31.10.1936 that it meant

the issue between Savitri and Fate or rather between the incarnate Light, the Sun Goddess, and Death the Creator and Devourer of this world with his Law of darkness, limitation, ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo modified the plan of the first book somewhat when he reached the first instalment of the Yoga of the Lord of the Horse. He had written earlier of a single “huge section” with subsections; he now described it as “a number of sections making the greater part of the first book”. The first section in this series (the third section of the first book) corresponded to the present Book One, Cantos Three to Five. It was initially given the title “Ascent to Godhead—Unveiling” and later renamed “The Yoga of the King”. After this there was a long passage describing Aswapati's progress through the subtle physical, vital and mental worlds towards the Overmind.

At first this fourth section had no title, but soon Sri Aurobindo was referring to it as the “Ascent through the Worlds”. The remaining sections in the Yoga of the Lord of the Horse would have been those leading up to and describing the vision of the Divine Mother, the subject of the present Book Three. According to the plan stated at the outset, the Book of Birth would have concluded with a section or sections describing the birth and childhood of Savitri.

But the version Sri Aurobindo had started sending to Amal was never completed. In any case, another major change in the scheme of the poem had become necessary. On 5 January 1937, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

I have been once more overwhelmed with correspondence, no time for poetry—so the Mind Worlds are still in a crude embryonic form and the



Psychic World not yet begun.... But the whole thing has been lengthening out so much that I expect I shall have to rearrange the earlier part of Savitri, turning the Book of Birth into a Book of Beginnings and lumping together in the second a Book of Birth and Quest.

This brought the structure of the growing epic one step closer to its final form. With this rearrangement, it had nine books. "The Book of Beginnings" has remained as the title of Book One of the final poem. In 1937, however, it corresponded to the present Part One, including what are now Books Two and Three, so that the Book of Birth and Quest, now Book Four, was the second book.

On 20 January 1937, Sri Aurobindo wrote that he had reached "the end of the Life-Worlds". He announced, to Amal's dismay, that there was now a "big gap" that would take time to fill:

Until I have got Mind into order and realised or rather embodied the Psychic, no farther instalments possible.

So the sending of passages was discontinued, though there were further exchanges regarding what had already been sent. Around the end of March, Amal asked optimistically: "May I dare to hope that tomorrow you really will send me an instalment of 'Savitri'?" He received the answer: "Physically, mentally, psychologically and temporally impossible."

By the next year, however, Sri Aurobindo could report substantial progress:

I have done an enormous amount of work with Savitri. The third section has been recast—not rewritten—so as to give it a more consistent epic swing and amplitude and elevation of level. The fourth section, the Worlds, is undergoing transformation.

But later in 1938, before his accident in November interrupted work on Savitri altogether for two or three years, Sri Aurobindo described the state of the poem as follows:

I have not been able to make any headway with Savitri—owing to lack of time and also to an appalled perception of the disgraceful imperfection of all the sections after the first two. But I have tackled them again as I think I wrote to you and have pulled up the third section to a higher consistency of level; the "Worlds" have fallen into a state of manuscript chaos, corrections upon corrections, additions upon additions, rearrangements on rearrange-

at the manuscripts of Savitri, which must have been there somewhere in the room.

The chance came in 1940, first only to place the requisite manuscripts before him, then gradually to work as a scribe. I still distinctly remember the day when, sitting on the bed with the table in front of him, he remarked: "You will find in the drawers long exercise books with coloured covers. Bring them." I think I went wrong in the first attempt, the second one met with his smiling approval. What he actually did with them, I cannot say, for he was working all alone, and we were sitting behind. (*Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 1988, p. 178).

The manuscripts show that in the early 1940s, Sri Aurobindo continued to concentrate on the part of the poem depicting the experiences of Aswapati: his Yoga, his ascent through the worlds, his vision of the Divine Mother.

The manuscripts show that in the early 1940s, Sri Aurobindo continued to concentrate on the part of the poem depicting the experiences of Aswapati: his Yoga, his ascent through the

ments out of which perhaps some cosmic beauty will emerge!

The early 1940s

Nirodbaran tells us that Sri Aurobindo's work on Savitri, brought to a halt by the accident in November 1938, could not be taken up again "before the middle of 1940":

For though he recovered from the accident sufficiently to take up intellectual work, his first preoccupation was with *The Life Divine*. After its publication in 1940, he resumed his work on Savitri (*Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 1988, p. 177).

Nirod now had the extraordinary privilege of being one of Sri Aurobindo's attendants. He mentions that for a long time he had to curb his impulse to peep

worlds, his vision of the Divine Mother. In the 1916 version of Savitri, this material had formed only a short passage. It had grown to become the longest section of "Quest". During the 1930s it had expanded through draft after draft of the first book until it formed the major portion of the Book of Birth, then almost the whole of the Book of Beginnings. A study of the manuscripts of this period, often baffling in the complexity of their revision, illustrates a remark made by Sri Aurobindo in 1936:

In fact Savitri has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative. (*Savitri*, 1993, p. 728)



We have seen that in 1938, according to Sri Aurobindo's own account, the "state of manuscript chaos" of the huge section on the "Worlds" was such that the emergence of any "cosmic beauty" from it seemed a remote prospect. But in 1942 a milestone was reached. In that year, Sri Aurobindo wrote out the whole of what was then the Book of Beginnings, corresponding to the present Part One. At the end he put: "Last draft of the first Book. (Completed; September 6, 1942.)"

This version occupies 110 pages of a notebook in which Sri Aurobindo was writing an average of 45 lines on a page. Thus its length is about 5,000 lines. The part of it corresponding to what was sent to Amal a few years earlier is three times the length of the 1936/37 version. Yet the total length of the 1942 version—26 years after Sri Aurobindo started *Savitri* and only eight years from the end—is less than half the nearly 12,000 lines of the eventual Part One.

Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo's designation of this version as the "last draft" is significant. It may be taken to mark a transition from the period in which he regarded *Savitri* "as a field of experimentation" with yogic poetry to the definitive process that would lead to the completion of the epic.

The Book of Beginnings as written out by Sri Aurobindo in 1942 had eight numbered sections with the following titles:

1. The Symbol Dawn
2. The Issue
3. The Yoga of the King
4. The Ascent through the Worlds
5. The Pursuit of the Unknowable
6. The Adoration of the Divine Mother
7. The House of the Spirit and the New Creation
8. The Vision and the Boon

The titles of the first two sections are familiar as the titles of the opening cantos of the present Book One. The last four sections correspond to the cantos of what is now Book Three. The third section, "The Yoga of the King", was destined to become three cantos and expand to four times the length it had in 1942.

Section 4, "The Ascent through the Worlds", accounted for 60% of the 1942 version. It was divided into twelve unnumbered subsections:

- The World Tier
- The Kingdom of Subtle Matter
- The Glory and Fall of Life
- The Kingdoms and the Godheads of the Little Life
- The Kingdoms and the Godheads of the Greater Life
- The Descent into Night
- The Worlds of Falsehood, the Mother of Evil and the Powers of Darkness
- The Paradise of the Life Gods
- The Worlds of Mind and the Heavens of the Ideal
- In the Self of Mind
- The World Soul
- The Kingdom of the Greater Knowledge

Later, "The Kingdoms and the Godheads of the Little Life" would become "The Kingdoms of the Little Life" and "The Godheads of the Little Life", while "The Worlds of Mind and the Heavens of the Ideal" would be divided into three cantos. Otherwise the titles of the subsections of "The Ascent through the Worlds" would remain, with minor changes, as the titles of the cantos of the final Book Two.

The division of the Book of Beginnings into three books was the next stage in the development of *Savitri*. Sri Aurobindo now took up a thick notebook and started again to write out the entire first book. Reaching the fourth section, "The Ascent through the Worlds", he wrote its number and title as before. But then he crossed this out and substituted "Book II", giving it a new title, "The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds". The subsections of "The Ascent through the Worlds" now became the twelve sections of the second book. The first book was reduced to three sections, but retained the title "The Book of Beginnings". The last four sections of the former massive Book of Beginnings were grouped into "Book III", which Sri Aurobindo entitled "The Book of the Divine Mother".

The 150 pages of this version of the first three books, probably written in 1943, show the growth of the poem since the 110-page "Book of Beginnings" of the previous year. There are fewer lines on a page, however, so the increase may be less than a thousand lines.

Later in the same notebook, Sri Aurobindo wrote out the whole Book of the Traveller of the Worlds again with the same twelve sections, revising and adding to it considerably. An example from this version of Book Two will give an idea of how far the poem had come in 1943 and how much remained to be done. I will discuss Sri Aurobindo's revision of a passage in the seventh section (now Canto Eight), then called "The World of Falsehood, the Mother of Evil and the Powers of Darkness".

The introduction of the "Worlds" into the scheme of *Savitri* in the early 1930s, and the vast expansion of this section until it became almost a third of the finished poem, gave Sri Aurobindo a way to include in the framework of his epic every aspect of the life of this and other worlds. The message of *Savitri* is not one of an otherworldly spirituality, but of the transformation of life on earth. Accordingly, the supraphysical worlds through which Aswapati travels are described, not for the sake of a purely mystical exploration of the Beyond, but in order to unravel the mystery of this world by tracking to their origins the disparate forces that move it.

In the early 1940s, the earth was passing through a crisis. Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1942 of "a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future". There was a "terrible danger" of the triumph of the forces behind Hitler and Nazism, which could bring about "a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race" and subject the work that has to be done "to conditions which would make it humanly impossible" (*On Himself*, 1972, p. 394). These forces had already succeeded to an alarming extent in creating hellish conditions in much of the world.

An instalment of *Savitri* sent to Amal in January 1937 had included these lines:



A warrior in the dateless duel's
strife
Challenging the Shadow with his
luminous soul,
He traversed the ambush of the op-
ponent Snake
And faced the enchantments of the
demon Sign....

By 1943 this passage had doubled in length, but kept its occult and symbolic character. Before Sri Aurobindo began to revise this page of the manuscript, it read as follows:

Here too the Traveller of the Worlds
must come.
A warrior in the dateless duel's
strife,
He entered into dumb despairing
Night
Challenging the darkness with his
luminous soul.
In vague tremendous passages of
Doom
He heard the goblin Voice that
guides to slay
And faced the enchantments of the
demon Sign,
And traversed the ambush of the
opponent Snake....

These lines themselves were to remain unchanged, except for the first, in this manuscript and through all subsequent revision. But after the fourth line, Sri Aurobindo made an insertion that would grow to 107 lines before *Savitri* was published. The final version of this passage includes graphic images of the war and totalitarian regimes, such as:

Uprooted cities, blasted human
homes,
Burned writhen bodies, the bomb-
shell's massacre.

These lines would be introduced later, but Sri Aurobindo filled the margin of the 1943 manuscript itself with drafts for a new passage. At the top he wrote five lines of which not much would eventually be kept as it was first worded:

In a harsh world of cruel joylessness,
A world of terror and of mystery
Where every step was dogged by
hideous powers,
To know its law and win that law's
release
He dared the horror of its monstrous
reign.

But most of the margin of this page of the notebook is filled with a longer series of lines—some of them hardly legible due to lack of space—beginning:

It was a realm of fierce and dolorous
Force.
A dire administration ruled the soul
And thought and life were a long
punishment;
Pain schooled rebellion into torpid
peace.
There was a mould of strange per-
verted mind
Glad in its own and others' calami-
ties
To which worst ill was now its high-
est good
And evil and agony seemed a natural
state.

Seven more lines were written below these in the margin. Thus began the development of a passage that was to grow into Sri Aurobindo's most vivid description of the world of falsehood that was threatening to take possession of the earth at the time when this was written.

The war Sri Aurobindo called from an inner point of view "the Mother's war" was won and the worst danger to the future evolution of humanity was averted for the time being. But the aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga was to find a radical cure for the malady of life and lift it permanently to a higher level, making a reversion to the reign of falsehood impossible.

The secret of this transformation is indicated on the page following the passage discussed above. In the 1937 version, Sri Aurobindo had already written cryptically of finding a key in the subconscious and Inconscient that sustain the ignorance and evil of the world:

Till, hurried to the last subconscious
floor,
He found the secret key of Nature's
change.
A Light went with him, an invisible
Hand....

By 1943 these three lines had been amplified into a passage of twenty-five lines. With some changes, it would become twenty-seven in the final version. In 1943, the passage began as it does now:

His being ventured into mindless
Void,
Intolerant gulfs that knew not
thought nor sense....

After thirteen lines leading to "the last locked subconscious's floor", Sri Aurobindo went on to describe the beginning of a transfiguration of darkness into light, the central theme of *Savitri*:

There Being sleeps unconscious of its
thoughts
And builds the worlds not knowing
what it builds;
There waiting its hour the future lies
unknown,
There is the record of the vanished
stars,
And there in the slumber of the
cosmic Will
He found the secret key of Nature's
change.
A light was with him, an invisible
Hand
Was laid upon the terror and the pain
That now became a quivering ecstasy,
The close shock of sweetness of an
Arm's embrace.

The two-column manuscripts

The manuscripts belonging to the early part of 1944 can easily be distinguished by their physical appearance. In the previous two years, Sri Aurobindo had used thick notebooks for much of his work on the epic. In each of the two most important notebooks of that period, he wrote out a complete version of



what later became Part One—in 1942 this was the first book and the next year it was divided into three books. But in the first half of 1944, he was writing *Savitri* in two columns on large loose sheets of paper.

It is in this two-column form that we find the last complete version of Part One written by Sri Aurobindo in his own hand. A close examination of it reveals that there has been a dramatic expansion since the previous year, bringing the first three books much closer to their final proportions.

Nevertheless, this will turn out to be far from the end of Sri Aurobindo's work on the first part of the poem. His handwritten recasts of existing passages and drafts of new ones continue in small note-pads until about 1946, becoming less and less legible due to his failing eyesight. Meanwhile the dictated revision begins. But all this belongs to the last phase of the composition of *Savitri*, the period from 1945 to 1950.

The last phase

The third and last major phase in the composition of *Savitri* begins around 1945 with Sri Aurobindo's return to the books that now form Parts Two and Three. Most of these books had not been touched since 1920 or earlier, when Sri Aurobindo had last worked on them in the context of "Savithri: A Tale and a Vision", a narrative poem in two parts and eight books, without cantos.

He continued to revise Part One, which from the early 1930s to 1944 had absorbed him almost to the exclusion of the rest of the poem. His long preoccupation with Aswapati's Yoga and ascent through the worlds had deepened the conception and enlarged the scope of *Savitri*. A heightening of poetic expression had caused Sri Aurobindo to become dissatisfied with "the old insufficient inspiration" of the early versions.

Therefore the books of Parts Two and Three, some of which were taken up again after an interval of twenty five years or more, needed extensive rewriting to make them consistent with the first part. Another problem was that the epic treat-

ment of Aswapati's Yoga now dwarfed the story of *Savitri* and *Satyavan* itself. Besides reworking and expanding what he had already written, Sri Aurobindo added long passages of entirely new material, including six cantos on *Savitri's* Yoga. Thus, in a relatively brief period, the principal books of the later parts were rapidly transformed and brought into harmony with the substance, style and scale of Part One.

The deterioration of Sri Aurobindo's eyesight in the mid-1940s had important consequences for his method of working. As his handwriting grew less legible, he came to rely increasingly on dictation to complete the revision of *Savitri*. Meanwhile the text was copied and typed in preparation for publication. Many separate cantos and finally the whole of Part One appeared in print before Sri Aurobindo's passing in December 1950.

The chit-pad versions

The work on Parts Two and Three distinguishes the last period in the composition of *Savitri* from the preceding phase. But the continuing revision of Part One is no less significant. Before describing the sequence in which Sri Aurobindo took up the later books, it will be convenient to conclude the survey of the manuscripts of Part One.

We have seen that the two-column manuscript of 1944 is the last continuous version of Part One written out by Sri Aurobindo in his own hand. Yet an example of a column of that manuscript ... revealed considerable differences from the final text. Most of the differences are due to work done by Sri Aurobindo in the small note pads he typically used around 1946.

These chit-pads contain material for all three parts of *Savitri*. The manner in which passages for Books One and Two are often interspersed with passages for the later books, especially Books Six and Ten, suggests that Sri Aurobindo was working simultaneously on different parts of the poem.

Several of these small note pads have remained intact. But sheets containing Sri Aurobindo's last handwritten versions of

passages for Part One were torn out of the pads and pinned to the two-column manuscript. These sheets with new or re-written matter replaced much of the 1944 version of Book One and were inserted at many points throughout Book Two.

Dictated revision

In a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy on 17 February 1945, Sri Aurobindo wrote about the condition of his eyes:

I had your letter read to me by Nirod—it would have been physically impossible for me to go through it myself, my eyes were too bad.... I have been suffering for some time from defective eyesight due to overstrain and chronic attacks on the eyes—especially in sleep.... I can write though I can't easily read what I have written and can't revise.... I hope this letter is not a jumble of mistakes or even more illegible than usual. I have tried to write as large and fair as was possible for me.

Eight days later, Sri Aurobindo observed in a dictated letter:

I may say that I see no reason for alarm or apprehension about my eyesight; it has happened before and I was able to recover even getting a better reading eyesight than before. These things are for me a question of the working of the Yogic force.

Nevertheless, there was no permanent improvement. Sri Aurobindo's handwriting from this time onwards visibly reflects his impaired eyesight. From 1945 to 1947 he continued to write, but his way of working on *Savitri* was determined by the situation he had described to Dilip: "I can write though I can't easily read what I have written and can't revise." He had his lines read to him—though, if necessary, he could sometimes read them with a magnifying glass—and he dictated the revision. After 1947, he stopped writing in his own hand altogether and worked entirely by dictation.



The role of the body in the Integral Yoga

Part I

Martha Orton

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's vision of the role of the body in the spiritual progression from ordinary human consciousness to supramentalization is a major departure from traditional spiritual perspectives on the body. In spiritual practice in the past, the body has been regarded not only as an obstacle on the spiritual path, because of its gross physical nature and its being the seat of unconsciousness and associated with various forms of desire, but it has also been scorned and even subjected to physical deprivation and punishments in order to tame it, in effect, or deny its relevance in the pursuit of a life of the spirit. While Sri Aurobindo and the Mother take a clear stand on the problems of the body, fully recognizing its difficulties, they also advocate including it in the spiritual life as part of the integral nature of the yoga and actually propose its ultimate divinization in the course of the evolution of consciousness. This is so because they regard spirit and matter as one. In his writings, particularly in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo resolves the duality of soul and nature, spirit and matter, and demonstrates their oneness. Furthermore Sri Aurobindo and the Mother regard spiritual progress as incomplete unless it includes the manifestation, for they envision a divine life on earth, fully including earth, not only the souls which inhabit it. In *Savitri*, his epic poem of spiritual ascent and transformation, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Earth must transform herself and
equal Heaven
Or Heaven descend into earth's
mortal state.
But for such vast spiritual change to
be,
Out of the mystic cavern in man's
heart



The heavenly Psyche must put off
her veil
And step into common nature's
crowded rooms
And stand uncovered in that nature's
front
And rule its thoughts and fill the
body and life.
(*Savitri*, 486-487)

Sri Aurobindo regards matter and spirit, body and soul, as being one and, not only confronts the traditional dualistic view, but also transcends it, revealing the higher truth behind the apparent reality. The following statement is an indication of the importance Sri Aurobindo attributes to the understanding and realization of this unity:

The affirmation of a divine life upon
earth and an immortal sense in
mortal existence can have no base
unless we recognise not only eternal
Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily
mansion, the wearer of this mutable
robe, but accept Matter of which it is
made, as a fit and noble material out
of which He weaves constantly His
garbs, builds recurrently the unending
series of His mansions.
Nor is this, even, enough to guard
us against a recoil from life in the
body unless, with the Upanishads,
perceiving behind their appearances
the identity in essence of these two

extreme terms of existence, we are
able to say in the very language of
those ancient writings, "Matter also
is Brahman", and to give its full value
to the vigorous figure by which the
physical universe is described as the
external body of the Divine Being.
(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, 18:6)

It is relevant to consider how human thinking came to see them as separate realities. This human assessment of separateness is deeply seated in its ignorance—that is, ignorance in its largest sense, the separation from the knowledge of reality. This ignorance has its basis in egoism, which consists of identification with a separate mind, life and body and a sense of oneself as a separate entity existing apart from other individuals. In contrast, true knowledge derives from the realization of oneness as the reality of the universe. Sri Aurobindo, writing about the attainment of the gnosis in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, discusses the universality of being as a necessary component of achieving higher consciousness and states: "This universality is impossible to achieve in its completeness so long as we continue to feel ourselves, as we now feel, a consciousness lodged in an individual mind, life and body." (*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, CWSA, 23:490) The division felt among beings is also experienced on the individual level and takes the form of a division among the parts of the being, with the soul and body commonly regarded as separate, the soul being eternal and the body its temporary instrument.

The human perception of the duality of spirit and body has its origins in the larger, universal duality of soul and nature. Sri Aurobindo states: "This division was made most clearly by the old Indian philosophies; but it bases itself upon the eternal fact of practical duality in unity upon which the world-manifestation is founded." (CWSA, 23:427) Sri Aurobindo describes this as having its origin in the vast single reality of the Purusha manifesting itself in the universe as Prakriti and, in this manifestation, a separation appearing to occur as part of the creation of nature in its diversity. This variety, however, is



merely the divine play and, however multiple it may seem, even with its various parts appearing vastly different from each other or in opposition to each other, there is one underlying reality of existence, and all are truly one.

Sri Aurobindo resolves the duality of Purusha and Prakriti, soul and nature, by going beyond the perception of them as separate realities and discovering where they meet and are actually one. He describes this as occurring where the two merge, with the Purusha being more than the silent, passive witness behind the creation, and giving its active support, active sanction, to the creation:

In the attitude of the Witness there is also a kind of sanction, but it is passive, inert and has no kind of absoluteness about it; but if he consents entirely to uphold, the sanction has become active, even though the soul may do no more than consent to reflect, support and thereby maintain in action all the energies of Prakriti. It may refuse to determine, to select, believing that it is God or Force itself or some Knowledge-Will that selects and determines, and the soul only a witness and upholder and thereby giver of the sanction, anumanta, but not the possessor and the director of the knowledge and the will, jnataisvarah. Then there is a general sanction in the form of an active upholding of whatever is determined by God or universal Will, but there is not an active determination. But if the soul habitually selects and rejects in what is offered to it, it determines; the relatively passive has become an entirely active sanction and is on the way to be an active control. (CWSA, 23: 433)

As the Purusha takes an active role it unites in energy and substance with the Prakriti and they are seen to be indeed two aspects of one reality. Additionally, when the soul accepts the active role of directing existence as master of nature, this leads to further fulfillment and under-

standing of the resolution of the duality of soul and nature. As master of nature, the soul is also, as Sri Aurobindo describes it "the knower, lord and enjoyer of Nature". (CWSA, 23:433) He describes an interplay of knowledge and force:

As the knower the soul possesses the knowledge of the force that acts and determines, it sees the values of being which are realising themselves in cosmos, it is in the secret of Fate. For the force that acts is itself determined by the knowledge which is its origin and the source and standardiser of its valuations and effectuations of values. Therefore in proportion as the soul becomes again the knower, it gets the capacity of becoming also the controller of the action whether by spiritual force alone or by that force figuring itself in mental and physical activities." (CWSA, 23:433)

Furthermore, in writing of this relation and interplay, Sri Aurobindo declares that the soul necessarily becomes "the active enjoyer, *bhokta*." (CWSA, 23:434) As the active enjoyer of nature then the soul unites with nature, Purusha with Prakriti, in Sachchidananda. Sri Aurobindo describes this result further: "Purusha and Prakriti in their union and duality arise from the being of Sachchidananda. Self-conscious existence is the essential nature of the Being; that is Sat or Purusha. The Power of self-aware existence, whether drawn into itself or acting in the works of its consciousness and force, its knowledge and its will, Chit and Tapas, Chit and its Shakti,—that is Prakriti." (CWSA, 23:435)

Consequently, with resolving the duality of soul and nature, with the realization that they are two aspects of one reality, the conflict supposed to exist between them is also resolved. Instead of being in opposition to each other, soul and nature can have a complimentary and harmonious existence. This is possible because each aspect has the potential to exist in its proper place and perform its intended role

in the overall scheme of existence. When the soul becomes master of nature, both are fulfilled. Soul is able to progress unhindered by the ties and weight of lower nature and nature is able to support the progress of the soul through its force and action and be its expression in the manifestation. As with the resolution of all conflict, all is well when each element finds its proper place.

In identifying the soul's role as master of nature and, moreover, demonstrating that Purusha and Prakriti, soul and nature are one, Sri Aurobindo lays the foundation for including the manifestation in the spiritual life and, more specifically, matter and the body in the integral yoga and in the transformation which he and the Mother envision.

Sri Aurobindo also expresses a perspective on the relevance of matter in his writings on the nature of reality. In *The Life Divine*, after developing his explanation for the underlying reality of life, Sri Aurobindo considers the nature and significance of matter:

We have now the rational assurance that Life is neither an inexplicable dream nor an impossible evil that has yet become a dolorous fact, but a mighty pulsation of the divine All-Existence. We see something of its foundation and its principle, we look upward to its high potentiality and ultimate divine out-flowering. But there is one principle below all the others which we have not yet sufficiently considered, the principle of Matter upon which Life stands as upon a pedestal or out of which it evolves like the form of a many-branching tree out of its encasing seed. The mind, life and body of man depend upon this physical principle, and if the out-flowering of Life is the result of Consciousness emerging into Mind, expanding, elevating itself in search of its own truth in the largeness of the supramental existence, yet it seems also to be conditioned by this case of body and by this foundation of Matter. (SABCL, 18:231)



Therefore Sri Aurobindo emphatically states that matter forms an essential basis of life and acknowledges the importance of the physical principle, including emphasis in regard to the development and expansion of consciousness. In addition, he specifically speaks to the importance of the body, as follows:

The importance of the body is obvious; it is because he has developed or been given a body and brain capable of receiving and serving a progressive mental illumination that man has risen above the animal. Equally, it can only be by developing a body or at least a functioning of the physical instrument capable of receiving and serving a still higher illumination that he will rise above himself and realise, not merely in thought and in his internal being but in life, a perfectly divine manhood. (SABCL, 18:231.)

While foreseeing an ultimate transformation of the body, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother do acknowledge the body as an obstacle in spiritual progress. For example, Sri Aurobindo states: "It seems indeed that the body is from the beginning the soul's great difficulty, its continual stumbling-block and rock of offence." (SABCL, 18:232) The essence of the problem posed by the body is its inertia and the influence of the inconscient within it. For the body is matter in a specific form and in matter consciousness has forgotten itself in its creation. Sri Aurobindo identifies three specific problems related to matter in the chapter titled "The Knot of Matter" in *The Life Divine*. He writes: "First, then, the fundamental opposition Matter presents to Spirit is this that it is the culmination of the principle of Ignorance. Here Consciousness has lost and forgotten itself in a form of its works, as a man might forget in extreme absorption not only who he is but that he is at all and become momentarily only the work that is being done and the force that is doing it." (SABCL, 18:243) The second problem which matter offers is its inherent bondage to the law of its

composition, what Sri Aurobindo calls "mechanic law": "...it is the culmination of bondage to mechanic Law and opposes to all that seeks to liberate itself a colossal Inertia." (SABCL, 18:243) Sri Aurobindo goes on to explain that, though matter itself is not inert but is "an infinite motion, an inconceivable force, a limitless action," (SABCL, 18:243) he states that its subjugation to mechanic law is so complete that matter resists the influences of mind and life and therefore presents a significant obstacle to integral progress and realization. At the point at which matter resists change, it, in effect "persuades Life and Mind that they cannot go farther, cannot pursue to the end their partial victory." (SABCL, 18:243) Both of these oppositions to the spirit constitute highly relevant reasons that matter needs to be addressed in the spiritual life and reasons to give importance to the transformation of matter, for as long as matter opposes the growth of consciousness through its ignorance and as long as it remains stuck in submission to mechanic law, the life of the spirit cannot progress beyond these points of opposition and resistance.

The third and final problem which matter poses is "...that it is the culmination of the principle of division and struggle." (SABCL, 18:245) Sri Aurobindo describes this as follows:

Indivisible indeed in reality, divisibility is its whole basis of action from which it seems forbidden ever to depart; for its only two methods of union are either the aggregation of units or an assimilation which involves the destruction of one unit by another; and both of these methods of union are a confession of eternal division, since even the first associates rather than unifies and by its very principle admits the constant possibility and therefore the ultimate necessity of dissociation, of dissolution. Both methods repose on death, one as a means, the other as a condition of life. And both presuppose as the condition of world-existence a constant struggle of the divided

units with each other, each striving to maintain itself, to maintain its associations, to compel or destroy what resists it, to gather in and devour others as its food, but itself moved to revolt against and flee from compulsion, destruction and assimilation by devouring. (SABCL, 18:245)

This opposition which matter poses to the spirit stands out as particularly significant to aspects of the integral yoga, for it relates to two key elements: (1) the acceptance of the principle of the unity of the universe, that all is Brahman and Brahman is all; (2) the acceptance of the belief that death is falsehood, life is eternal, and that the mortality of the body is to be conquered. Therefore the implications of the divisiveness of the nature of matter and its relation to death both point to the need for the transformation of matter in order to remove it as an obstacle to the full flowering of the spirit in mankind and in the universe.

It is important to consider how the fundamental oppositions of matter influence our lives as human beings and necessarily influence our spiritual life. Sri Aurobindo gives indications of this in the following statement:

Death, division, mutual resistance and exclusion between embodied masses of the same conscious life-force are the formula of our physical existence; the narrow limitation of the play of the senses, the determination within a small circle of the field, duration and power of the life-workings, the obscuration, lame movement, broken and bounded functioning of the mind are the yoke which that formula expressed in the animal body has imposed upon the higher principles. (SABCL, 18:254)

Given the depth, breadth and pervasiveness of these limitations, the goal of awakening the consciousness in matter, revealing the Divine within matter and transforming it, seems liberation indeed. The need for this transformation and the necessity of its integrality becomes in-



creasingly apparent as one reflects on the role of matter in the life of the being, both on an individual level and on the universal level. Sri Aurobindo informs us that matter with all its limitations has a higher destiny and that the human body, as a being of matter, also does. In referring to the resistance of matter to the spirit, he writes:

There are superior states, there are higher worlds, and if the law of these can by any progress of man and by any liberation of our substance from its present imperfections be imposed on this sensible form and instrument of our being, then there may be even here a physical working of divine mind and sense, a physical working of divine life in the human frame and even the evolution upon earth of something that we may call a divinely human body. The body of man also may some day come by its transfiguration; the Earth-Mother too may reveal in us her godhead. (SABCL, 18:254)

Sri Aurobindo explains that in our present lives the soul cannot express itself completely through the mind and vital and is even further limited in its expression by the body. Even when the body obeys the will of the soul. It imposes limitations by its very nature. Sri Aurobindo explains:

But the body, even in obeying, limits and determines the mind's and the life's self expression by the limited possibilities and acquired character of its own physical instrumentation; it has besides a law of its own action, a movement and will or force or urge of movement of its own subconscious or half-emerged conscious power of being which they can only partially,—and even in that part more by an indirect than by a direct or, if direct, then more by a subconscious than a willed and conscious action,—influence or alter. (*The Life Divine*, SABCL, 19:985)

Therefore he proposes a reversal of the

relations of the spirit with mind, life and matter in which the spirit is master of the body, becoming in full control of it. This action parallels Sri Aurobindo's writings on the Purusha becoming master of Prakriti and, in the two thus assuming their right relation. Furthermore, since the body is subject to the subconscious and inconscient, when the spirit takes control, it will bring the light of the superconscience, the supramental, into the body and enlighten and uplift it, ultimately transforming it.

Sri Aurobindo describes the potential hidden within the inconscient and the role of matter in the following passage:

The body, we have said, is a creation of the Inconscient and itself inconscient or at least subconscious in parts of itself and much of its hidden action; but what we call the Inconscient is an appearance, a dwelling place, an instrument of a secret Consciousness or a Superconscient which has created the miracle we call the universe. Matter is the field and the creation of the Inconscient and the perfection of the operations of inconscient Matter, their perfect adaptation of means to an aim and end, the wonders they perform and the marvels of beauty they create, testify, in spite of all the ignorant denial we can oppose, to the presence and power of consciousness of this Superconscience in every part and movement of the material universe. It is there in the body, has made it and its emergence in our consciousness is the secret aim of evolution and the key to the mystery of our existence. (*The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL, 16:10-11)

The Mother has also commented extensively on the new consciousness and its effect on life and matter. For example, the following statement describes this conception of the spirit taking control of matter and transforming it:

We want an integral transformation, the transformation of the body and all its activities.

Formerly, when one spoke of transformation one meant solely the transformation of the inner consciousness. One tried to discover in oneself this deep consciousness and rejected the body and its activities like an encumbrance and a useless thing, in order to attend to the inner movement. Sri Aurobindo declared that this was not enough; the Truth demanded that the material world should also participate in this transformation and become an expression of the deeper Truth. But when people heard this, many thought it was possible to transform the body and its activities without bothering in the least about what is happening within—naturally this is not quite true. Before you can undertake this work of physical transformation, which of all things is the most difficult, your inner consciousness must be firmly established, solidly established in the Truth, so that this transformation may be the final expression of the Truth—"final" for the moment at least. (*The Mother's Vision*, 494)

In this statement we can see the role of the spirit, leading the body, as master of matter, in its growth towards transformation. Once again we are reminded of the importance of fully engaging life in the world in the spiritual journey, engaging matter in the transformation and not forsaking life and matter through retreating into a realm of pure spirit. The Mother emphasizes this:

Because until now evil has been opposed by weakness, by a spiritual force without any power for transformation in the material world, this tremendous effort of goodwill has ended only in deplorable failure and left the world in the same state of misery and corruption and falsehood. It is on the same plane as the one where the adverse forces are ruling that one must have a greater power than theirs, a power which can conquer them totally in that very



domain. To put it otherwise, a spiritual force which would be capable of transforming both the consciousness and the material world. This force is the supramental force. What is necessary is to be receptive to its action on the physical plane, and not to run away into a distant Nirvana leaving the enemy with full power over what one abandons.

It is neither sacrifice nor renunciation nor weakness which can bring the victory. It is only Delight, a delight which is strength, endurance, supreme courage. The delight brought by the supramental force. It is much more difficult than giving everything up and running away, it demands an infinitely greater heroism—but that is the only way to conquer. (*The Mother's Vision*, 557)

Therefore, the Mother not only explains the crucial importance of including life and matter in the spiritual quest, the great necessity of doing so in order to make the victory over evil and falsehood complete and enduring, but she also tells us how it is possible to actually transform matter through the influence of the supramental force. It is also quite striking that the Mother speaks both of heroism and delight. This is quite an unfamiliar combination of concepts for we usually think of heroism as being somberly arduous and as not conducive to considerations of delight or any other lighter or happier emotions. This juxtaposition of terms gives us pause and points to the fact that heroism and delight combined are possible simply for the very fact that the supramental consciousness is a completely new consciousness in the human sphere. Living and striving within it is a completely new experience with altogether different capacities and qualities of being. Therefore being a courageous and heroic warrior for truth and transformation promises to be a delightful experience and unlike any which has gone before.

The extent of difference of the new spiritual life, and its mission of collaborating in bringing a new world, is beautifully expressed by the Mother:

First, it is not only a “new conception” of spiritual life and the divine Reality. This conception was expressed by Sri Aurobindo, I have expressed it myself many a time, and it could be formulated somewhat like this: the old spirituality was an escape from life into the divine Reality, leaving the world just where it was, as it was; whereas our new vision, on the contrary, is a divinisation of life, a transformation of the material world into a divine world. This has been said, repeated, more or less understood, indeed it is the basic idea of what we want to do. But this could be a continuation with an improvement, a widening of the old world as it was—and so long as this is a conception up there in the field of thought, in fact it is hardly more than that—but what has happened, the really new thing, is that a new world is born, born, born. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a new world which is born. And we are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entangled—where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed—unnoticed to the extent that outwardly it doesn't disturb anything very much, for the time being, and that in the consciousness of most people it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, growing—until it is strong enough to assert itself visibly. (*The Mother's Vision*, 578-579)

Therefore we are assured that a change is taking place on occult levels which enable the ultimate transformation of matter. Humanity can participate consciously or unconsciously in this change. The Mother describes quite emphatically the importance of incorporating life and body in the spiritual journey and aspiring for their transformation and explains how this is essential on both the individual

level as well as for the world in general:

An inner illumination that does not take any note of the body and the outer life is of no good use, for it leaves the world as it is. This is what has continually happened till now. Even those who had a very great and powerful realization withdrew from the world to live undisturbed in inner quiet and peace; the world was left to its ways, and misery and stupidity, Death and Ignorance continued, unaffected, their reign on this material plane of existence. For those who thus withdraw, it may be pleasant to escape from this turmoil, to run away from the difficulty and to find for themselves a happy condition elsewhere; but they leave the world and life uncorrected and untransformed; and their own outer consciousness too they leave unchanged and their bodies as unregenerate as ever. Coming back to the physical world they are likely to be worse there than even ordinary people; for they have lost the mastery over material things, and their dealing with physical life is likely to be slovenly and helpless in its movements and at the mercy of every passing force. (*The Mother's Vision*, 493)

From this we see further indication of the importance, in fact the absolute spiritual relevance, of including life and the body in the transformation and also of continuing emphasis in the integral yoga of attaining mastery of nature in order to progress along the path. However, one may say that it is all very well in theory to assert that humanity should take on this new challenge, but then question how to go about pursuing the path to physical transformation. The Mother explains this further:

The starting-point of this transformation is receptivity, we have already spoken about it. That is the indispensable condition for obtaining the transformation. Then comes the



change of consciousness. This change of consciousness and its preparation have often been compared with the formation of the chicken in the egg: till the very last second the egg remains the same, there is no change, and it is only when the chicken is completely formed, absolutely alive, that it itself makes with its little beak a hole in the shell and comes out. (*The Mother's Vision*, 494)

From this we can conclude that our primary task is to become receptive to the divine Force, to open ourselves and our natures to its influence, to offer ourselves for the Divine's work in the world as willing instruments. By stating that "one's inner consciousness must be firmly established, solidly established in the Truth" (*The Mother's Vision*, 494), the Mother encourages the seeker to address the sincerity of one's inner being, the clarity of one's aspiration, that it not be mixed with egoism, which leads to intermixture of falsehood and ignorance and can take one from the path or make the journey very convoluted and even more difficult than it otherwise would be. With a sincerely receptive inner being, the individual seeker can receive more fully the force of the Divine and more effectively experience the transformation of one's nature, one's life in the world, and ultimately one's physical being, therefore one's entire consciousness. [To be continued]

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Researching the practice of Integral Yoga in life and work

by Larry Seidlitz

In collaboration with the Indian Psychology Institute, I have begun an exploratory study to examine long-term spiritual growth through Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga and its influence on four fields of professional endeavour—management, education, health care, and arts. Because the principles relating to the practice of Integral Yoga as described in the literature take different forms in the actual lived experiences of the individuals who pursue it, the focus of this study is on the lived experience of long-term practitioners of the discipline, and to see how their practice has influenced their professional work.

The qualitative research methods used in this study will utilize concepts and techniques that have been developed specifically to examine subjective human experience, including its more intangible and significant dimensions such as spiritual experience, meaning, and fulfilment. A focus of the methods will include in-depth, semi-structured interviews with approximately 20 long-term practitioners of Integral yoga, active in the four fields of professional endeavour. The intention is to focus on common themes emerging from these interviews, as well as on individual variations in the practitioners' lived experience vis-à-vis their own growth and their professional work. The study will relate its findings to principles and processes that have already been described in the literature, but also identify issues that have not been previously emphasized or discussed.

In the present paper, after discussing the basic approach and methods on which the investigation is based, I will describe some preliminary findings based on just four interviews that illustrate the kinds of outcomes that may be generated with this type of research.



Alternative paradigms of research

Research is often equated in people's minds with a paradigm of scientific inquiry that emphasizes objectivity and quantitative methods, but there exist alternative approaches more conducive to studying the subjective experiences of people in various domains, including those of spirituality and yogic endeavor. The traditional paradigm of scientific research is based on certain assumptions. According to Braud and Anderson (1998), these include:

The major aim of research is the discovery of general principles or universal laws that provide the possibility of explanation, prediction, and control.

The only valid knowledge of the world is obtained via data derived through the senses, consensually validated by others, and extended and expressed via logically sound mathematical and linguistic formalisms.

A researcher's ideal stance is to be as neutral, uninvolved, and distant as possible with respect to what is being studied. Because researchers' qualities are irrelevant to their objective observations, researchers may be interchanged. Virtually identical findings are expected from all



researchers who repeat the research procedures, provided they are appropriately skilled and have been properly trained.

The preferred outlets for original research findings and interpretations are peer-reviewed journal articles and professional conference presentations; the researcher communicates primarily with professional colleagues. (pp. 5-6)

In recent decades, however, such assumptions have been questioned and criticized, and the limitations of traditional research approaches have been highlighted. As described by Braud and Anderson (1998), such critiques have argued:

Research is value laden. Our research methods are influenced by judgments about their soundness, trustworthiness, and use, and these involve considerations of value and worth... Individual, societal, and cultural values influence the types of subject matter, topics, and research questions we study and also influence how we carry out our work and how that work is supported, encouraged, communicated, and received.

An aim of research is the discovery of general principles or universal laws that provide the possibility of explanation, prediction, and control. An equally acceptable and valid aim is the full description, understanding, and appreciation of individual cases or instances.

Quantitative/experimental and qualitative/naturalistic methods provide different types of information about different domains of inquiry. The former is appropriate for certain research questions, aims and subject matter, whereas the latter is appropriate for other questions, interests, and topics.

The researcher is an extremely im-

portant component of any research effort. Personal characteristics of the researcher may have profound impacts on the outcomes of the research project.... A standardized, distanced, and objective researcher who remains apart from what is studied is an illusion.

The purposes, intentions, and goals of all research personnel (researcher, participants, and audience) contribute significantly to the design, conduct, and outcomes of research studies.... (pp. 13-17)

Braud and Anderson (1998) go on to discuss the assumptions and practices of what they call "an expanded approach to science, research, and disciplined inquiry." Several of the important assumptions of this new approach include the following:

The universe is a single whole within which every part is connected to every other part; this wholeness includes the physical world as well as all contents of consciousness.

Pragmatically useful scientific explanations enhance understandings of phenomena by relating them to other phenomena and relationships... The search for ultimate reductionistic cause is futile; there is no cause and effect but rather the evolution of a whole system.

Reality is contacted through physical sense data, but also through being ourselves part of the oneness—through a deep intuitive inner knowing. Awareness includes (objective) sensation as well as (subjective) intuitive, aesthetic, spiritual, noetic, and mystical aspects.

The entire spectra of states of consciousness are of interest, including religious and mystical experiences and experiences of "other dimensions of reality." Such experiences have been at the heart of all cul-

tures, including our own. They been among the main sources of the deepest value commitments; they may an important investigative tool, a "window" to other dimensions of reality. (pp. 10-11)

Braud and Anderson (1998) nicely summarize and contrast the aims of the conventional approach to research with various expanded approaches as follows:

The conventional, positivist approach to research describes, explains, predicts, controls. The heuristic approach describes, understands, appreciates. The feminist approach tells, listens, emancipates, empowers. The transpersonal approach expands, enlarges, enriches, opens, interconnects (within and without), integrates, unifies, awakens, transcends, transforms, and (ultimately and hopefully) enlightens. (p. 26)

Integral Inquiry

Among the expanded research methods informing the present study is Integral Inquiry as it is described by Braud (1998). Braud describes four types of questions that may be asked about any issue of research, each of which may best be approached with different research methods. While individual studies may address just one or several of these types of questions, a comprehensive programme of research on a topic that includes multiple studies would ideally address all four types of questions using a wide range of methods. The four types of questions pertain to four basic issues: experience, conceptualization, process, and fruits. Experience questions include "what is the experience of x ?" and "How is x perceived by the participant." Conceptualization questions include "How can we conceptualize x ?" and "What are useful explanations or interpretations of x ?" Process questions include "How does x unfold as a process?" and "What are the concomitants of x ?" Fruits questions include "What are the outcomes or consequences of x ?" (p. 38)



For developing deeper understanding of a particular type of human experience, which is the aim of the present study, Braud discusses several important issues. He notes that in this type of research, the “boundaries between research, practical application, and personal growth and transformation can melt away.” (p. 43) This type of research typically involves in-depth interviews with people about their experience of the phenomenon under consideration. Like all research, such studies can provide useful information about the issue to the consumers of the research (e.g. individual readers, and potentially to society as a whole). But because such studies typically aim to penetrate deeply into crucial and subtle aspects of human experience to reveal and clarify their nuances, hidden dimensions, and significant possibilities, they can also have enriching and even transforming effects on such consumers. Secondly, such studies may be profoundly revealing, cathartic, enriching, or transforming for the participant interviewees, as they introspect about and disclose important, sometimes hidden aspects of their life and experience. In this connection, Braud discusses a body of research which has shown that “the opportunity to tell one’s story and speak one’s own voice has healing power” (p. 43). Thirdly, hearing these stories and working with the interviewees on these issues can also result in change and transformation in the investigators. All of these are legitimate aims of Integral Inquiry.

Related to the interpretation of information collected in interviews, Braud (1998) discusses three approaches to interpreting and discovering meaning in scriptures that were recognized by Origen (185-254 C.E.): “seeking literal, concrete meanings (*somatikos*); developing meanings through intellectual, logical, and associational means (*psychikos*); and seeking spiritual, allegorical, symbolic, and metaphorical meanings (*pneumatikos*).” (p. 48) He then suggests that the life stories and experiences of people could also be approached as texts to be interpreted and understood using these three methods. In other words, the researcher need not be

limited by the surface, concrete meanings of such interviews, but rather, these surface meanings can serve as stimuli to delve more deeply into other possible meanings which may or may not have been conscious to the individual speaker. Further in this direction, Braud noted a study in which a researcher listened to tape-recorded interviews while in a meditative state, while “attending to visual, auditory, and proprioceptive images—and their emotional and intuitive meanings—that arose in him as he listened...” (p. 50) Thus, the researcher may tap inner dimensions of experience and knowing to extend the deeper understandings and meanings elicited by the interviews.

Braud (1998) further generalizes this process of attending to alternative forms of knowledge in the research process. He suggests, “The integral inquirer uses a pluristic epistemology throughout the research effort—polling all facets of herself or himself (bodily reactions, imagery, emotions and feelings, intuitions, and aesthetic sensibilities, as well as cognition) to learn about the research topic from as many perspectives as possible. The researcher not only polls herself or himself but also obtains reports of these diverse modes of knowing from all research personnel.” (p. 64)

Braud also articulates a possible spiritual dimension that may augment such approaches that penetrate deeply into the subject for understanding and meaning. As he puts it: “Such a step involves paying full attention to what is known directly by the eye of the spirit; this type of knowing seems to require a change or transformation in the investigator’s being. It requires that the investigator become what is being studied and to know it as subject rather than as object” (p. 51).

The utilization of such subtle modes of knowing by the researcher implies a prior development of the faculties of perception, intuition, spiritual knowledge and identification. Braud (2014) provides a detailed discussion about the preparation of the researcher for such research. He notes that “a researcher can know only that for which his or her being has been

adequately prepared.” (p. 87) He then quotes Cornelissen (2001) who suggested that various forms of yogic practice and concentration can be utilized to purify the mind, emotions, vital drives, body, and ego-sense to enable greater objectivity, precision and reliability in the utilization of inner and higher layers of consciousness for the research endeavor. Braud (2014) notes that this purification enables “the researcher to reduce various distractions and biases that might distort what is to be known,” but beyond this, “can help the researcher adjust his or her very being in ways that can allow more direct forms of knowing the object of research” (p. 88).

Heuristic Inquiry

Another important approach to research informing the present study is Heuristic Inquiry, as described by Douglass and Moustakas (1985). The key methodological ingredient and first phase of heuristic research is the researcher’s self-immersion in the question, the problem, the issue that is the subject of the research. Self-inquiry is the starting point and even the foundation of the study. It is this direct knowledge and inner experience which should inform other data collection. The second phase of Heuristic Inquiry is external data collection, which ideally comes only after this self-exploration has proceeded for some distance. In this approach, “data are broadly construed to mean that which extend understanding of or add richness to the knowing of the phenomenon in question.” (p. 48) Thus, data may be collected in a variety of forms including interviews, reading relevant literature, visiting or exploring relevant institutions, and exploring nature.

An important concept in Heuristic Inquiry is the issue of “focusing” and “differentiation.” The researcher considers different possible foci of the research, and also considers a wider array of issues that may be relevant and important to investigate as subsidiary issues. The research does not need to be cut and dry and limited to one’s initial questions, and indeed, even the methods may change as one proceeds



in order to go deeper into the subject. The main criterion is to delve deeply into the truth and meaning of the issue, not to follow a particular protocol.

Another intriguing aspect of Heuristic Inquiry is the emphasis on “disclosing the self as a way of facilitating disclosure from others... The heuristic scientist, in contact with others, places high value on the depth and sensitivity of interchange, on the promise of I-Thou moments, and on the steady movement towards a true intersubjectivity. The concept of intersubjectivity is drawn from existentialism and refers to a communal flow from the depths of one self to another self, and to qualities of purity and loving integrity in interactions with others.” (p. 50-51).

The third phase of Heuristic Inquiry, after immersion into the subject and the acquisition of data, is called realization. This refers to the “quest for synthesis through realization of what lies most undeniably at the heart of all that has been discovered. Synthesis goes beyond distillation of themes and patterns. It is not a summary or recapitulation. In synthesis, the searcher is challenged to generate a new reality, a new monolithic significance that embodies the essence of the heuristic truth.” (p. 52)

Experiential accounts of the practice of Integral Yoga

While the focus of the research is on the application of Integral Yoga in the several types of professional work, several of the questions give us insights into the nature of the practice of the Yoga more generally for these relatively advanced practitioners. We find in several of the interviews a developed interiority, a certain poise of calm, reflection, and equanimity, which is a basic foundation for the practice of this Yoga as described by Sri Aurobindo. We find not only evidence of this poise in their demeanor, but that the development and extension of this poise is a conscious pursuit in their life and work. For example, Thomas (names of all the



The Mother. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

participants have been changed) indicated that the most prominent aspects or processes of the sadhana at this point were for him “Being flexible, widening as much as possible, trying to stabilize the peace which sometimes goes very deep and very intense—I don’t have it continuously, but it’s settling. Widening is the most important thing and not losing the balance.” Widening, he explained, “means when certain things come in, and you think in a different way, you take it in, not leave it outside... That doesn’t mean that I have to agree, but slowly to understand, you have to first take it in, see it and study it, and once you are part of it by taking it in, you might potentially see certain things which might be positive, and other things not.” Nilima explained what was most important in her sadhana at this point in this way, “Well, I do what I can to see myself sincerely, without prejudice, and try to find the places in me that stop me from

attending to my life in the spirit.” For Karuna, it was “to be completely free from within of prejudices, free of attachments, free of desires. And I think to channelize one’s energies for something that is more meaningful.” One of the most important aspects of sadhana for James was to have “Less of the small person [in himself] jumping up and down, making a fuss.”

We also find that several of these individuals perceived an inner contact with the Divine, which though sometimes may have felt strong and sometimes weak, was persistent and well-established. For example, James, when asked what aspects or processes of the Yoga were most prominent, noted that one of them was “Remembering the Mother more constantly.” Thomas said, “Sadhana means that you live as conscious as possible, from the time you get up until you go to sleep, and even beyond that” [i.e. during sleep]. Nilima said, “I know that the Mother is with me and I can call on Mother to be with me in the class and I am sure She is.”

While the participants did not usually speak directly about their more rare or exceptional spiritual experiences (we did not directly ask about them and often it said that it is better not to speak of them), sometimes they alluded to such experiences in a relatively general way. For example, Nilima said, “when I came in 1974, [I thought] it’s all very well. I was very respectful about people’s beliefs, but [I thought] this is not for me. I just got out of that [i.e. religion] (laughs). I just left that and so you know it was not for me. But then I had experiences that I could not deny...”

James had an experience which led him to come to India: “One morning while I was on my bed I had this vision. I don’t like to describe too much about the vision, but it meant ‘go to India.’ So I gave notice at work, and phoned up my mother that morning, and said, ‘I have to go to India...’ When I reached India, partly I felt that I had reached home. I traveled a lot in north India before coming to south India.



When I came to Pondicherry it seemed quite by chance, because I hadn't realized that Pondicherry was my objective, I only realized after arriving here. But then I felt truly at home after arriving in Pondy."

James later added, "I had this marvelous experience which brought me to India, and the experiences that I've had here have left that one far behind. So the life here, if we can follow the Yoga, participate in the Yoga, is a great thing. We've had so many sadhaks before us who very quietly they lived their life and make so little noise about it. This would be a model to follow."

Integral Yoga completely changes the outlook on life

We asked for some of the important ways in which Yoga has changed their life. Three of these participants indicated that it had completely changed their life. James said, "It's too far-reaching to say a number of ways. It just wakes you up from inside. It is the fundamental thing which just changed everything." Thomas indicated, "Basically, I changed totally, everything changed." When asked whether the Integral Yoga changed her outlook on the world, Nilima said, "Absolutely. Entirely." Elaborating on how and why it has changed, Nilima said, "Well, that there is a purpose to all this. I mean, before I thought [you] do what you can, have a happy life and a kind life, that sort of thing. But [to understand] that there is actually a purpose to this whole adventure with the evolution, the descent of light into matter, the descent of the divine into matter, to transform matter and make a supramental world, that this process is happening, changes your outlook on everything. There is nothing that does not change in that light. So your work, your friendships, your everything just changes. It's not just to have a nice time."

Karuna also perceived a great difference in the outlook that she acquired when learning about the Yoga compared to her associates. She said that "when I truly read a lot of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, I realized that they really have a different perspective to life—the depth of their vi-

sion, the broadness of the thoughts. When I looked at how other students around me who might be coming from a general education background, how differently they thought. It a very different way of looking, a different attitude to life. The broadness of vision in Mother's Yoga—everything is done for the Divine."

Work, sadhana and the general course of life tend to merge

Some of the participants seemed to make little or no distinction between work and sadhana, or between work and life, or between sadhana and life. As James simply said, "There is no difference between my sadhana and my work." Elaborating on this point, James said, "I came to India in search of the Truth. I wanted to know what is the Truth. Circumstances seemed to draw me into music. Music gave me the most wonderful experiences in my early days, and even now. So there was no question for me whether I should follow the musical path. And my music, path, and life just began to merge into one. It's hard to say. Everything has helped everything else."

James further elaborated on this identity between his sadhana and music. "Before coming to India, I had never heard that music could bring me to a state of realization. But in India I hear of music saints, like Swami Haridas or Saint Tyagaraja, music saints who are there in Indian history for hundreds of years. These musicians have realized the Divine through their music." When asked whether the music itself has become a way for him to move towards or to enter into unity with the Divine, James replied, "Yeah. With the example of the musician saints of India, it is like a big 'yes' for me in my life that I can follow this path."

Thomas described the merging of life and Yoga succinctly, "Everything is Yoga and everything is coming in, and everything is running contemporarily." He then elaborated, "Work is basically the check-point to see how far you can put in practice what you are trying to attain in the sadhana. It is a reference point. It is nice to

read and be quiet, but as soon as you come into contact with others, then things start to change." He added, "In the work field, your sadhana is easily tested. It is concrete, like the material world. That is why I think that Sri Aurobindo finds it very important that you work. It is something that makes you see where you are with your sadhana, in the sense of what changes you made and how you are doing your sadhana and where to improve. [It is] something very concrete."

Karuna, when explaining what was important in her sadhana, mentioned "to channelize one's energies for something that is more meaningful." And then she added, "And in that direction, in that something more meaningful, I would like, through art, to see how I can realize that, to make work for art as my sadhana." Karuna also showed how art is closely intertwined with her sadhana from another angle. When asked whether she discovers something about herself through her art, she replied, "In fact, you come to know yourself more and more. And also we realize that we don't know ourself. And then you are searching to understand your true self. I think art is the best vehicle for doing that, because art is where there is nothing else in between, it is you and you confront yourself. That is exactly happens in meditation and yoga. I would say that the only difference is that here you express it through something that has a material manifestation, which is the artwork. While when you meditate or do your yoga it is completely inside." Further in this direction, she indicated, "more and more, I am trying to call for a completely blank mind, so that you are not disturbed by your own mundane thoughts, and then you can just allow whatever wants to come. In fact, that is, I think, not an easy exercise. That is what I would like to achieve, to feel just like a mirror, or just an empty space."

Karuna also mentioned the transformational function of art. She said, "Sri Aurobindo said that there are three roles of art—I am quoting from *The National Value of Art*: the first role of art is decorative, the second is educational, and the third is spiritual... where it has to transform us,



it has to change our consciousness. This understanding of art becomes another means of self-transformation. It is something very deep.” Further along this line she said, “I think [art] is the best reflection of the personality of anyone. At the end, if you want to create something beautiful, you have to first yourself be beautiful, you have to yourself first think beautifully. You cannot be thinking that I will make something and I will be something else. That is the main thing: that changing one’s self first, working on oneself. Actually, doing the painting is actually insignificant; that also is not the aim. The true purpose of painting, you actually get to converse with yourself. It is like a soliloquy with yourself that you have. And that is the best thing that I find about my work.”

Feeling connected with the Divine leads to perfect harmony and efficiency in the work

At times, several of the participants would feel that they were in contact with the Divine and that at such times the work they were doing flowed naturally, harmoniously, and perfectly. James put it this way: “Sometimes, on special occasions, it seems like Mother is just present, and then it seems that nothing can go wrong. I feel supported in everything, so everything can change.”

Concerning his teaching, James said, “My work is a lot about interacting with children and students... While I am using my musical knowledge, I am interacting with others, I am giving what I have learned. But I feel very much Mother’s help while doing that. It seems that when I demonstrate things ... it seems to come out better when I am demonstrating to a student than when I am playing for myself or in a concert even. So I feel good in interacting with others that way.”

In her teaching, Nilima said, “It does help and the more I remember... sometimes I don’t. If I am caught up in my day then this is just one other class, I can com-

pletely forget to do it. But if I do call, the class changes its tone because Mother said as soon as you... and I can feel [it]. If I say, ‘please be with me in this,’ it’s there and the class changes... The quality.”

Thomas explains that through his concentration on the work, solutions come automatically: “For instance, I don’t know a lot of software, I just click here and there and it comes. Just don’t ask me to do it again. Of course, when you do an operation again and again, it becomes part of your critical knowledge. Otherwise it’s kind of “purely intuitive.” The vibration comes from above and it gets realized. You’re not the one doing it. That is a beautiful sensation. You make the moves: you take the scissors when you need it, you need a number of cards and you take exactly the right number of cards. Those are

“...it seems like it is her path, not mine. I am simply cooperating, participating, or it is like I am putting up the sail to catch a little bit of that divine breeze. But it’s her path.”

nice moments. The more you are concentrated and penetrating into the things you have to do ... the more this comes. Those are again what I call Ananda moments.”

Karuna mentioned that in painting, “there are times when you are surprised, “Oh, you did this!” You’re taken aback, you’re pleasantly surprised. And you realize that something has happened... It is important to break that mundane habitual ritual, and get into a rhythm where you are moved really from inside to do a thing, and then you do it.”

Difficulties are not prominent and are seen as part of the sadhana

Some of the participants could not readily identify difficulties in their work; it seemed that they had been reconceptualized in such a way that they were not seen as difficulties, but rather as opportunities for growth and making progress, and as an inevitable part of the sadhana that they

had undertaken.

For example, James said that he had few difficulties in his teaching, but later said that his students provided him with many challenges, for example, coming late, coming unprepared, not paying attention, but that these things were quite natural as they were children. For James, the Ashram school setting also obviated what might otherwise be difficulties, and he imagined that if he was working in an ordinary school he might have difficulties disciplining students, but that in the Ashram school he has “students who come because they like the music, they want to learn.”

In his growth as a musician, James said that he didn’t have difficulties, “because it seems like it is her path, not mine. I am simply cooperating, participating, or it is like I am putting up the sail to catch a little bit of that divine breeze. But it’s her path.”

After being unable to identify any difficulties, Thomas expressed it this way, “Nothing. I can’t think about difficulties.

What I notice now by your question is that I really don’t see difficulties. I don’t make them beforehand. What I notice is that I start living more and more now, in the moment. If difficulties will come up, then I will solve them. And if I don’t solve them then the solution might come later. For me, I just try to do things as good as I can at that moment. If I will meet difficulties, then I will solve them. And if I can’t solve them, I keep on trying to do my best without making too much a problem of it. I pray to the Mother. And then usually after sometime the solution comes.”

Karuna discussed her relation with difficulties this way: “one thing that I am trying to do more and more is live in the present, and the attitude that whatever is happening is Thy Will, ... not to be upset with anything that happens, because that is what is the Divine Will, and to accept it as it is. Because I realize that we spend so much time sometimes in thinking about



our past, which is over and we cannot change. And half the sorrow of the people is about the future, and they imagine things which may never happen. As an effect, we forget to live in the present and enjoy the present. And to be 100% in the present, give ourselves 100%. I think that is the best way to live life: to do your best at every moment, and anything that happens that is beyond your command, is like Her Will, and accept it as Her Will.”

Participants ask for help from the Divine and feel they receive it

Thomas said, “Every time I ask for help in what I call in a very sincere way, and you are open, then it comes, straight away. Instantaneous, you don’t even have to wait. It’s there, boom! At maximum, the day after. But usually it comes, poof.” Discussing his call for help in obtaining new clients, Thomas said, “Sometimes it happens to be that I cannot keep that well my peace and when I start to be really desperate, I say, ‘Mother, help me.’ And then, it is like she opens the shower. Because, it is not just one, but two or three [clients] come, and I say, ‘Now it’s enough.’ This kind of contact I have. It’s nice.”

James said, “If I happen to have a moment when I can be silent and quiet and call the Divine, it is like a complete cessation of all interfering waves and the pouring down of a harmonizing force. So it seems like the more I would call it the better off I would be, in everything.” Later he stated, “More and more, hopefully, I learn to call the Divine all the time, because, as I have said, music and life have kind of merged.”

Money is often absent or negligible as a motivating factor

Thomas, who is self-employed in his native country part of the year when not doing volunteer work for the Ashram, ex-

plained that the motivation in his work for making money “is less and less. Before I thought I should gather certain sums, which I always did, by the way. I put a goal, and usually I went even beyond it. But now, as I told you before, I think that what you need will come. That gives me a lot of peace. It won’t make me a rich man. You do your best, the results you leave to God.” James, who works in the Ashram, explained his relationship with money this way, “I am very fortunate that money is not a concern. I realize that it is something that I need, to have at least some level, and even to feed myself as I had when I was growing up. I have to do that much to look after myself. But I don’t like dealing much with money, and I’m lucky that I don’t have to deal much with money. In the world situation there is a lot of wrong that goes on with many people’s money. This has to change.” Similarly, Nilima who

works in the Ashram explained, “I am in a lucky position that I have enough money to live on that my father left me, nothing to do with my own. I am fortunate in that way that I don’t have to worry as long as I keep my head above me.”

Karuna needs to earn money through her art work to support herself. She said, “Money is an important power because it helps you to do something. But you should never be ridden by money to the extent that you forget what it is for. In that context, I have realized that money—it is quite interesting—it is something that comes when it is needed. If you really need it, it comes... For me it’s a miracle, because there would be a day when I wouldn’t know how I would buy the milk tomorrow, and the next day I would have to write a check for one lakh rupees I have had these kinds of days. And you cannot imagine, it has just come—sometimes sent by someone in the family, a friend would give a loan, sometimes someone donated some money.

“I think money is a power which has to be very judiciously handled. And we should also not taboo it. It is good that money be in the right hands, then good work happens. That is the ancient thing: renunciation, there should be no material possessions. We don’t need to think like that. It should be an *inner* renunciation, and you have to do everything as perfectly as possible.”

In education, children are viewed first as souls

Nilima explained what she values most in her work as a teacher: “The thing I would value most is to be able to help the children see the Divine within them, feel the Divine or at least feel their own beauty, their own worth. That’s the thing that I would value and whatever else they want to do or not do is fine. Subjects they like,

they don’t like, it’s ok. If they know who they are and what they love, then that’s

“If I happen to have a moment when I can be silent and quiet and call the Divine, it is like a complete cessation of all interfering waves, and the pouring down of a harmonizing force.”

the most important thing, for me.” Nilima also explained that she exemplifies these values into her teaching, “I perceive them that they are as part of the Divine. This is clear. Whatever other elements they have they are a spark of the Divine and this is what I want to talk to whenever I am talking and that happens more or less. And I want them to know that I respect them.”

Nilima elaborated on these points when discussing her central motivation in teaching, “It seems to me that if people value themselves they become positive forces in the world. If they don’t value themselves they become negative forces in the world. If they know that they are beautiful, and everybody is in his or her own right, if they know that they are beautiful, they are valuable, they are loved then they can go out and give those things to other people. It increases the harmony and the beauty in the world. But if they think they aren’t, they shrink from what they could be, they shrink from the love they could



give, the love they could receive, they shrink from things.”

James explained his approach to teaching music like this, “I can’t tell these children what to do; they are too independent. They are too mature, most of them. I myself, when I was young, I didn’t really want to learn from anybody, a completely independent type. Our children are the same. I can only teach (when) they want. This is the only interaction I have, I don’t have any authority. It is their love for music which brings a response from my love for music, it brings an interaction there. It is that which is driving everything, there is no authority.... I suppose the art is in getting to know the students, getting to know what they want, what they like. Then I can offer them something.”

Karuna discussed her approach to teaching art this way, “How does one teach art? Because what happens is that we follow a very set schooling, in a way which is the academic schooling of doing some studies and all that. But if you go back to the way the Indian art was practiced, they never did a model drawing, they never did a still life, it was more a Far Eastern attitude through identification of subject... let’s say [you want to paint] the compassion of the Buddha, you first have to experience compassion, only then you can paint compassion, and these kinds of things. It is a combination, a little bit we start like the Western people would do, about sketching from life, and all that, but at the end the whole thing is identifying with the subject. So if you want to paint a cow, you have to really visualize the cow within your mind. It should be that only when you see with your eyes that you can paint, it should be inside. That comes when you do a lot of it. I would like to influence them with these kinds of habits. I am constantly telling my students, first draw from life... Nature is something which never finishes its [store] of knowledge and inspiration, you can endlessly keep creating from nature. But the problem is, nowadays, with the whole digital age and digital culture, the whole reference is through photos, visuals, internet knowledge, and I think all this is very limited. I don’t encourage that.”

Conclusions

As shown in the examples above, the interview questions appear to be eliciting interesting insights into the actual lived practice of the Integral Yoga by long-term practitioners, and particularly into the way it applies to their professional work. It is encouraging that our initial interviewees have expressed such a depth of experience and wisdom with us which they have developed over several decades of practice of the yoga and applying it in their life and professional work. At a basic level, these initial results show us that the Integral Yoga works, that it can and does yield significant results and all-embracing positive changes in the lives of experienced practitioners. We are also particularly encouraged by the finding that the experience of inner communion or connection with the Divine (however we wish to name it) leads not only to inner peace and happiness, but to greater perceived effectiveness in work.

The themes we have identified here for this report are just some of the most obvious that leapt out from a reading of the four transcripts; a closer analysis of the transcripts would certainly yield additional common themes as well as significant unique experiences that will be important for appreciating the possibilities and implications of the Yoga for life and work. A more comprehensive report based on a larger number of interviews would yield not only a richer database of experiences, but would embed these experiences in the theoretical and social context of the Integral Yoga and its practice, and draw out more fully their implications for these fields of endeavour and for life more generally. Some of the themes we identified, such as the merging of spiritual practice, life and work, the reconceptualization of difficulties, of working diligently and happily without monetary reward, of perceiving to be in frequent or regular contact with an inner source of wisdom and ability which gets expressed in work, all seem to have important ramifications for professional life, but these need to be further considered and developed.

Having only four interviews at our disposal, we could not delve much into either the processes associated with applying the Yoga to the individual professions, nor to their impact or outcomes in the different professions. As three of our first interviewees were teachers, here we have only briefly described as an example some of the findings associated with applying the Integral Yoga in the field of education. This is a field in which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have provided relatively clear and unconventional guidelines, and it is interesting to see how these guidelines are being applied by these teachers. We are sufficiently encouraged by these initial findings that a greater number of interviews in each of the specific fields will yield significant insights for work in the various professions.

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An equation for organizational creativity

by Pravir Malik

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

It has been said that the Universe is re-created at every instant (One recent book review from earlier this year covering this topic—Godhead: The Brain's Big Bang). But even if we cannot wrap our minds around that insight, it is evident that we are continuously creating.

Every instant of our lives is a creative act. We cannot but help that. It is our inherent nature. If from nothing else, this should be evident from the fact that we are at least the result of the interaction of two generously creative entities—the Earth and the Sun.

But the question is—what is it that we are creating? More often than not our acts of creativity reinforce the past that exists. Being so, we do not notice what is being created because the output already exists. This dynamic is captured by the first of the equations: $P\text{-centeredness} + V\text{-centeredness} > M\text{-centeredness}$, where P signifies the physical-orientation, V the vital-orientation, and M the mental-orientation.

What this is telling us is that the sum of our P-centeredness, that is centeredness in what the eye can see and hence the past, and V-centeredness, that is centeredness in self-referencing energy or egoistic movements, is greater than our M-centeredness, that is centeredness in genuine curiosity and progressive questioning. In other words we are subject to stagnated patterns that are generally anchored around the physical or vital orientations.

It is only in completing the stagnated patterns, that something other than what had already structured the past can appear (this notion is covered in greater detail in the book: *Connecting Inner Power with Global Change*). When stagnated patterns are completed, then our creativity, which is happening ALL the time becomes more visible, since what is produced is something OTHER than what had existed before. The equation that describes this con-

dition is: $P\text{-centeredness} + V\text{-centeredness} < M\text{-centeredness}$.

Being that every element is creative, and in fact seeks to reinforce its *raison d'être* wherever it can, it can be said that creativity is fractal in nature—that is, it tends to repeat itself on different scale. This insight suggests that the set of equations are true for organizations at different scale. Hence the psychology of a person, practically determined by the play of P-centeredness, V-centeredness, and M-centeredness, will also determine the creativity that may or may not exist at a department, unit, corporate, market, system, or global level.

The Desert Flower: Journey to an ideal

by Pravir Malik

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

Rare is it when a person's life becomes an ideal. Rarer still when a person's life is true to their name. Yet the life of Waris Dirie, meaning Desert Flower, depicts how this became true in her case.

Born into a nomadic Somalian family, she was subject to the traditions that bound such people, and at the age of five suffered the procedure of female genital mutilation. At age 13 she was being forced into marriage with a 61-year old, and it was then that she fled from her home and hazarded the journey across the desert to Mogadishu.

What does it take to flower in the desert, to overcome all nature of challenge, and flower out into an ideal that becomes an icon of hope and light?

After all, this situation is true for most organizations, regardless of scale. Whether the organization is a person, family, community, corporation, or country, it is much easier for the organization to maintain the status quo—to continue without change, simply subscribing to the forces that had been in existence even before its own. This phase of maintaining the status quo is like the physical or "Seed State" in the 3-phased flower's journey (refer to *The Flower Chronicles*), and can easily continue indefinitely.

A first step away from this has to be taken, so that a different set of dynamics can begin to come into being. In Waris Dirie's life this was her act of running away from the familiarity of her home and all her known relationships. An act such as this often requires one to be open to a different voice, something much deeper than that which visible life offers us.

But when that first decisive step is taken, and an organization opens to a different order of being, to the possibility present in the ubiquitous Fractal for Progress, then something different begins to manifest. In Waris Dirie's life this something different was finding herself being moved to London, UK. The journey could have ended there, but continual opening to that deeper impulsion so that thought and action is driven by something beyond the comfort and easy familiarity of one's own, allows entry into the vital or second stage of the three-phased flower's journey, the "Stalk Stage".

Here there is a growth in different directions, and an increasing interaction with a larger range of forces and circumstances. In Dirie's life this is perhaps captured by her quickly becoming a super-model. In fact these external forces and circumstances reshape the organization in ways it could never imagine, and if there continues to be that opening to the deeper voice of the ubiquitous Fractal for Progress, then the mental or "Flower" stage of the journey can be reached.

Then all the stages of the ubiquitous journey are seen for what they really were, a preparation by an Intelligence far vaster than one's own, to create a springboard for something that transcends the limits of the little person. This is where the idea resident in the seed comes into manifestation, the intent and purpose of the journey becomes clear, and the Ideal begins to develop a life of its own. This is where the little girl born into a life tremendously pitted against her, can turn it around and change established tradition into something far more meaningful.

It is the reaching of such Ideals that make life worth it, and that reshapes possibility along the unimaginable contours, surfaces, and beauty of even unknowable flowers.



Source Material

Work as sadhana

by Sri Aurobindo

Right attitude in work

The spiritual effectivity of work of course depends on the inner attitude. What is important is the spirit of offering put into the work. If one can in addition remember the Mother in the work or through a certain concentration feel the Mother's presence or force sustaining or doing the work, that carries the spiritual effectivity still farther. But even if one cannot in moments of clouding, depression or struggle do these things, yet there can be behind a love or bhakti which was the original motive power of the work and that can remain behind the cloud and reemerge like the sun after dark periods. All sadhana is like that and it is why one should not be discouraged by the dark moments, but realise that the original urge is there and that therefore the dark moments are only an episode in the journey which will lead to greater progress when they are once over.

*

As for the work, it is a means of preparation, it can also be a means of growing into the inner consciousness. But then it must be done not as work only but as an offering to the Mother, without insisting on the ego, with an aspiration to feel her Force working in one, her Presence presiding over the work, seeking to give all to her, not claiming anything for oneself. That is the spirit of work offered as a sacrifice; done like that, work becomes a sadhana and a Yoga.

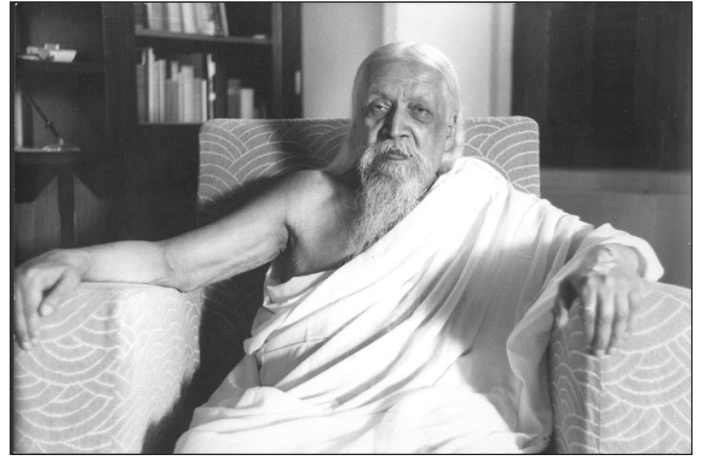
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What you have to realise is that your success or failure depends, first and always, on your keeping in the right attitude and in the true psychic and spiritual atmosphere and allowing the Mother's force to act through you.

If I can judge from your letters, you take its support too much for granted and lay the first stress on your own ideas and plans and words about the work; but these whether good or bad, right or mistaken, are bound to fail if they are not instruments of the true Force. You have to be always concentrated, always referring all difficulties for solution to the force that is being sent from here, always letting it act and not substituting your own mind and separate vital will or impulse.

Proceed with your work, never forgetting the condition of success. Do not lose yourself in the work or in your ideas or plans or forget to keep yourself in constant touch with the true source. Do not allow anybody's mind or vital influence or the influence of the surrounding atmosphere or the ordinary human mentality to come between you and the power and presence of the Mother.

*



You know what is the right thing to do—to take and keep the necessary inner attitude—when there is the openness to the Force and the strength, courage and power in action coming

from it, outward circumstances can be met and turned in the right direction. (*The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA)*, Vol. 29 (*Letters on Yoga II*), pp. 242-243)

Equanimity in work

Helpless acceptance [of difficulties] is no part of the Yoga of works—what is necessary is a calm equanimity in the face both of helpful and adverse, fortunate or unfortunate happenings, good or evil fortune, success or failure of effort. One must learn to bear without flinching and disturbance, without rajasic joy or grief, doing all that is necessary, but not dejected if difficulties or failure come—one still goes on doing what can be done, not sinking under the burden of life.

*

To keep this equanimity and absence of reactions and from that calm ground to direct the Yoga-force on things and persons (not for egoistic aims but for the work to be done) is the position of the Yogi.

*

This is the right inner attitude, of equality—to remain unmoved whatever may outwardly happen. But what is needed for success in the outward field (if you do not use human means, diplomacy or tactics) is the power to transmit calmly a Force that can change men's attitude and the circumstances and make any outward action taken at once the right thing to do and effective.

*

You have to make yourself an instrument of the invisible Force—to be able in a way to direct it to the required point and for the required purpose. But for that samata must be entire—for a calm and luminous use of the Force is necessary. Otherwise the use of the Force, if accompanied by ego-reactions, may raise a corresponding ego-resistance and a struggle.

*

The increase of samata is only a first condition [for attacks



by adverse forces to become impossible in one's work]. It is when on the basis of samata an understanding Force can be used to make their attacks nugatory that the attacks will become impossible. (CWSA, Vol. 29 (*Letters on Yoga II*), pp. 243-244)

The impersonal worker

To be impersonal, generally, is not to be ego-centric, not to regard things from the point of view of how they affect oneself,—but to see what things are in themselves, to judge impartially, to do what is demanded by the purpose of things or by the will of the Master of things, not by one's own personal point of view or egoistic interest or ego-formed idea or feeling. In work it is to do what is best for the work, without regard to one's own prestige or convenience, not to regard the work as one's own but as the Mother's, to do it according to rule, discipline, impersonal arrangement, even if conditions are not favourable to do the best according to the conditions etc. etc. The impersonal worker puts his best capacity, zeal, industry into the work, but not his personal ambitions, vanity, passions. He has always something in view that is greater than his little personality and his devotion or obedience to that dictates his conduct.

*

Your difficulty in work is that you regard it too much as your work and from your personal point of view. So questions of personal convenience, ideas, way of doing things, prestige, demands take a big place—and the result is quarrels. You have to learn to be impersonal. Even in the world work cannot be well done without that. How much more necessary is it for a sadhak of Yoga! (CWSA, Vol. 29 (*Letters on Yoga II*), pp. 244-245)

Service of the Divine

There should be no straining after power, no ambition, no egoism of power. The power or powers that come should be considered not as one's own, but as gifts of the Divine for the Divine's purpose. Care should be taken that there should be no ambitious or selfish misuse, no pride or vanity, no sense of superiority, no claim or egoism of the instrument, only a simple and pure psychic instrumentation of the nature in any way in which it is fit for the service of the Divine.

*

To be free from all egoistic motive, careful of truth in speech and action, void of self-will and self-assertion, watchful in all things is the condition for being a flawless servant. (CWSA, Vol. 29 (*Letters on Yoga II*), p. 245)

All work equal in the eyes of the Spirit

Self-dedication does not depend on the particular work you do, but on the spirit in which all work, of whatever kind it may be, is done. Any work, done well and carefully as a sacrifice to the Divine, without desire or egoism, with equality of mind and calm

tranquillity in good or bad fortune, for the sake of the Divine and not for the sake of any personal gain, reward or result, with the consciousness that it is the Divine Power to which all work belongs, is a means of self-dedication through Karma.

*

Of course the idea of bigness and smallness is quite foreign to the spiritual truth. Spiritually there is nothing big or small. Such ideas are like those of the literary people who think writing a poem is a high work and making shoes or cooking the dinner is a small and low one. But all is equal in the eyes of the Spirit—and it is only the spirit within with which it is done that matters.

It is the same with a particular kind of work, there is nothing big or small.

*

In the wider consciousness one can deal with the small as well as the high things, but one comes to deal with them with a larger as well as a profounder, subtler and more accurate view coming from a more and more understanding and luminous consciousness so that the thoughts about small things also cease to be themselves small or trivial, being more and more part of a higher knowledge.

*

One must be able to do the same work always with enthusiasm and at the same time be ready to do something else or enlarge one's scope at a moment's notice.

*

The sadhak ought to be ready to do any work that is needed, not only the work he prefers.

*

It is not that you have to do what you dislike, but that you have to cease to dislike. To do only what you like is to indulge the vital and maintain its domination over the nature—for that is the very principle of the untransformed nature, to be governed by its likes and dislikes. To be able to do anything with equanimity is the principle of karmayoga and to do it with joy because it is done for the Mother is the true psychic and vital condition in this Yoga. (CWSA, Vol. 29 (*Letters on Yoga II*), pp. 246-248)

Working from within

You must learn to act always from within—from your inner being which is in contact with the Divine. The outer should be a mere instrument and should not be allowed at all to compel or dictate your speech, thought or action.

*

All should be done quietly from within—working, speaking, reading, writing as part of the real consciousness—not with the dispersed and unquiet movement of the ordinary consciousness.

*

One can work and remain quiet within. Quietude does not mean having an empty mind or doing no action at all.

*

When one is concentrated within, the body can go on doing



its work by the Force acting within it. Even the external consciousness can work separately under the motion of the Force while the rest of the consciousness is in concentration.

*

It is a little difficult at first to combine the inward condition with the attention to the outward work and mingling with others, but a time comes when it is possible for the inner being to be in full union with the Mother while the action comes out of that concentrated union and is consciously guided in all its details so that some part of the consciousness can attend to everything outside, even be concentrated upon it and yet feel the inward concentration in the Mother.

*

It is a very good sign that even in spite of full work the inner working was felt behind and succeeded in establishing the silence. A time comes for the sadhak in the end when the consciousness and the deeper experience go on happening even in full work or in sleep, while speaking or in any kind of activity.

*

It is probably because at the time of the work the tendency of the consciousness to externalise itself is greater (that is always the case), so the pressure grows stronger in order to produce a contrary inward tendency. This produces some tendency to go inside in the way of a complete internalisation (going into a sort of samadhi); but what should happen during work is a going inside in a wakeful condition and becoming aware of the psychic within as you used to do under the pressure while the outer mind does the work. This is the condition that must eventually come.

*

The stress of the Power is all right, but there is really nothing incompatible between the inner silence and action. It is to that combination that the sadhana must move.

*

It [concentration of the inner consciousness] can happen in several forms. It can become concentrated in silence as the witness—it can become concentrated in the feeling of the Divine Force flowing through it, the work being a result—it can become concentrated in the feeling of the presence of the Divine or the Ananda or love of the Divine while the working goes on separately in front. All this becomes so habitual that it goes on of itself without the need of call or effort or even of the mind's attention—it simply is there. There are other possibilities besides those mentioned above, but these are perhaps the most common.

*

It is perfectly possible to do work in an entire emptiness without any interference or activity of the lower parts of the consciousness. (CWSA, Vol. 29 (*Letters on Yoga II*), pp. 254-256)

Inner guidance about work

It is good that you were able to observe yourself all the time and see the movements and that the intervention of the new consciousness was frequent and automatic. At a later stage you will no

doubt get a guidance in the mind also as to how to do the things you want to get done. Evidently your mind was too active—as well as the minds of others also—and so you missed your objective, owing to the excessive multitude of witnesses!

However—

*

If you want that [to become conscious of whether an action is right or not] very much and aspire for it, it may come in one of several ways— (1) You may get the habit or faculty of watching your movements in such a way that you see the impulse to action coming and can see too its nature, (2) a consciousness may come which feels uneasy at once if a wrong thought or impulse to action or feeling is there, (3) something within you may warn and stop you when you are going to do the wrong action.

*

As for the feeling from within, it depends on being able to go inside. Sometimes it comes of itself with the deepening of the consciousness by bhakti or otherwise; sometimes it comes by practice—a sort of referring the matter and listening for the answer—listening is of course a metaphor but it is difficult to express it otherwise—it doesn't mean that the answer comes necessarily in the shape of words, spoken or unspoken, though it does sometimes or for some; it can take any shape. The main difficulty for many is to be sure of the right answer. For that it is necessary to be able to contact the consciousness of the Guru inwardly—that comes best by bhakti. Otherwise it may become a delicate and ticklish job. Obstacles, (1) normal habit of relying on outward means for everything, (2) ego, substituting its suggestions for the right answer, (3) mental activity, (4) intruder nuisances. I think you need not be eager for this, but rely on the growth of the inner consciousness. The above is only by way of general explanation.

*

A constant aspiration for that [to be constantly governed by the Divine] is the first thing—next a sort of stillness within and a drawing back from the outward action into the stillness and a sort of listening expectancy, not for a sound but for the spiritual feeling or direction of the consciousness that comes through the psychic.

*

Your difficulty is that you worry yourself and think you have made mistakes when you have made none. If you want to get the right guidance, you must have more confidence and not always think that what comes to you is wrong and your work is bad and ugly. You generally get things right. If you do make a mistake here and there, it does not matter; everybody makes some mistakes; but by making them one can learn better.

Another thing is that, as I have told you, a thing can be done in several ways, all of which are good—but your mind seems to go on the feeling that one thing is good or true and all the rest is bad or false and, as it were, is seeking for the one only good way and then in everything it does it feels dissatisfied. When you have



found a way of doing the work, it is better to do it and not always be worrying yourself for something better.

*

It is always the restlessness that makes you lose touch. If you are not sure about the work, remain quiet and you will get in time the idea of what to do; if you worry and are restless, you get confused and disturbed and can no longer feel connection with the Force, though it is always there above you and supporting you. As to blind selfish feelings, they are still more confusing and disturbing; but here too the only thing is to remain quiet, detach yourself, disown and throw away the feeling. To get upset, disturbed and in despair, is no use; it only prolongs the confusion and unrest and prevents you from feeling the connection.

*

Openness in work means the same thing as openness in the consciousness. The same Force that works in your consciousness in meditation and clears away the cloud and confusion whenever you open to it, can also take up your action and not only make you aware of the defects in it but keep you conscious of what is to be done and guide your mind and hands to do it. If you open to it in your work, you will begin to feel this guidance more and more until behind all your activities you will be aware of the Force of the Mother. (CWSA, Vol. 29 (*Letters on Yoga II*), pp. 260-262)

Receiving the Divine Power or Force

To be able to receive the Divine Power and let it act through you in the things of the outward life, there are three necessary conditions:

1. Quietude, equality—not to be disturbed by anything that happens, to keep the mind still and firm, seeing the play of forces, but itself tranquil.
2. Absolute faith—faith that what is for the best will happen, but also that if one can make oneself a true instrument, the fruit will be that which one's will guided by the Divine Light sees as the thing to be done—*kartavyam karma*.
3. Receptivity—the power to receive the Divine Force and to feel its presence and the presence of the Mother in it and allow it to work, guiding one's sight and will and action. If this power and presence can be felt and this plasticity made the habit of the consciousness in action,—but plasticity to the Divine Force alone without bringing in any foreign element,—the eventual result is sure. (CWSA, Vol. 29 (*Letters on Yoga II*), p. 266)

The working of the Force

When you have opened yourself to a higher Force, when you have made yourself a channel for the energy of its work, it is quite natural that the Force should flow and act in the way that is wanted or the way that is needed and for the effect that is needed. Once the channel is made, the Force that acts is not necessarily bound by the personal limitations or disabilities of the instrument; it can disregard them and act in its own power. In doing so it may use

the instrument simply as a medium and, as soon as the work is finished, leave him just what he was before, incapable in his ordinary moments of doing such good work, capable only when he is seized and used and illumined. But also it may by its power of transforming action set the instrument right, accustom it to the necessary intuitive knowledge and movement so that this living perfected instrument can at will call for and receive the action of the Force. In technique, there are two different things,—there is the intellectual knowledge which one has acquired and applies or thinks one is applying—there is the intuitive cognition which acts in its own right, even if it is not actually possessed by the worker so that he cannot give an adequate account of the modes of working or elements of what he has done. Many poets have a very summary theoretic knowledge of metrical or linguistic technique; they have its use but they would not be able to explain how they write or what are the qualities and constituent methods of their successful art, but they achieve all the same things that are perfect in the weaving of sounds and the skill of words, consummate in rhythm and language. Intellectual knowledge of technique is a help but a minor help; it can become a mere device or a rigid fetter. It is an intuitive divination of the right process that is more frequent and a more powerful action—or even it is an inspiration that puts the right sounds or right words without need of even any intuitive choice. This is especially true of poetry, for there are arts—those that work in a more material substance—where perfect work cannot be done without full technical knowledge,—painting, sculpture, architecture.

What the higher Force writes through you is your own in the sense that you have been an instrument of manifestation—as is indeed every artist or worker. When you put your name to it, it is the name of the instrumental creator; but for sadhana it is necessary to recognise that the real Power, the true Creator was not your surface self, you were simply the living harp on which the Musician played his tune.

The true Ananda of creation is not the pleasure of the ego in having personally done well and in being somebody, that is an extraneous element which attaches itself to the true joy of work and creation. The Ananda comes by the inrush of a larger Might and Delight, *āveśa*; there is the thrill of being possessed and used by a superpersonal Power, the exultation and exaltation of the uplifting of the consciousness, the joy of its illumination and its heightened and heightened action and the joy of the beauty, power or perfection that is being created. How far, how intensely one feels these things, depends on the condition of the consciousness at the time, the temperament, the activity of the vital, the mind's receptivity and response. The Yogi (or even certain strong and calm minds) is not carried away, as the mind and the vital often are, by the Ananda,—he holds and watches it and there is no mere excitement mixed with the divine flow of it through the conscious instrument and the body. There is a greater Ananda of samarpana, of spiritual realisation or divine love, but in the spiritual consciousness and life the Ananda of creation has its place. (CWSA, Vol. 29 (*Letters on Yoga II*), pp. 268-270)



Work for the Divine

by the Mother

General offering and detailed offering

It has been said that in order to progress in Yoga one must offer up everything to the Divine, even every little thing that one has or does in life. What is precisely the meaning of that?

Yoga means union with the Divine, and the union is effected through offering is—founded on the offering of yourself to the Divine. In the beginning you start by making this offering in a general way, as though once for all; you say, “I am the servant of the Divine; my life is given absolutely to the Divine; all my efforts are for the realisation of the Divine Life.” But that is only the first step; for this is not sufficient. When the resolution has been taken, when you have decided that the whole of your life shall be given to the Divine, you have still at every moment to remember it and carry it out in all the details of your existence. You must feel at every step that you belong to the Divine; you must have the constant experience that, in whatever you think or do, it is always the Divine Consciousness that is acting through you. You have no longer anything that you can call your own; you feel everything as coming from the Divine, and you have to offer it back to its source. When you can realise that, then even the smallest thing to which you do not usually pay much attention or care, ceases to be trivial and insignificant; it becomes full of meaning and it opens up a vast horizon beyond.

This is what you have to do to carry out your general offering in detailed offerings. Live constantly in the presence of the Divine; live in the feeling that it is this presence which moves you and is doing everything you do. Offer all your movements to it, not only every mental action, every thought and feeling but even the most ordinary and external actions such as eating; when you eat, you must feel that it is the Divine who is eating through you. When you can thus gather all your movements into the One Life, then you have in you unity instead of division. No longer is one part of your nature given to the Divine, while the rest remains in its ordinary ways, engrossed in ordinary things; your entire life is taken up, an integral transformation is gradually realised in you.

In the integral Yoga, the integral life down even to the smallest detail has to be transformed, to be divinised. There is nothing here that is insignificant, nothing that is indifferent. You cannot say, “When I am meditating, reading philosophy or listening to these conversations I will be in this condition of an opening towards the Light and call for it, but when I go out to walk or see friends I can allow myself to forget all about it.” To persist in this attitude means that you will remain untransformed and never have the true union; always you will be divided; you will have at best only glimpses of this greater life. For although certain experiences and realisations may come to you in meditation or



in your inner consciousness, your body and your outer life will remain unchanged. An inner illumination that does not take any note of the body and the outer life, is of no great use, for it leaves the world as it is. This is what has continually happened till now. Even those who had a very great and powerful realisation withdrew from the world to live undisturbed in inner quiet and peace; the world was left to its ways, and misery and stupidity, Death and Ignorance continued, unaffected, their reign on this material plane of existence. For those who thus withdraw, it may be pleasant to escape from this turmoil, to run away from the difficulty and to find for themselves a happy condition elsewhere; but they leave the world and life uncorrected and untransformed; and their own outer consciousness too they leave unchanged and their bodies as unregenerate as ever. Coming back to the physical world, they are likely to be worse there than even ordinary people; for they have lost the mastery over material things, and their dealing with physical life is likely to be slovenly and helpless in its movements and at the mercy of every passing force.

An ideal of this kind may be good for those who want it, but it is not our Yoga. For we want the divine conquest of this world, the conquest of all its movements and the realisation of the Divine here. But if we want the Divine to reign here we must give all we have and are and do here to the Divine. It will not do to think that anything is unimportant or that the external life and its necessities are no part of the Divine Life. If we do, we shall remain where we have always been and there will be no conquest of the external world; nothing abiding there will have been done. —28 April 1929 (*Collected Works of the Mother (CWM)*, Vol. 3, pp. 23-25)

Work as an offering to the Divine

Let us offer our work to the Divine; this is the sure means of progressing.

*

Consciousness develops best through work done as an offering to the Divine.

Indolence and inaction end in *tamas*: that is a fall into unconsciousness; it is contrary to all progress and light.



To overcome one's ego, to live only in the service of the Divine – that is the ideal and the shortest way towards acquiring the true consciousness.

*

You must do the work as an offering to the Divine and take it as part of your Sadhana. In that spirit the nature of the work is of little importance and you can do any work without losing the contact with the inner presence.

*

When there is not enough work in my department, can I spend my time reading or drawing?

Your work is your sadhana, and it is by doing your work in a spirit of consecration that you can make most progress.

I think it would be better not to tire yourself too much by reading or drawing. —18 February 1933

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I would like to know, isn't there also the same sadhana in reading and drawing?

Everything can be made into a means of finding the Divine. What matters is the spirit in which things are done. —21 February 1933

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Work done in the true spirit is meditation. —15 September 1934

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All depends on the attitude with which you do the work. If done with the right attitude, it will surely bring you nearer to me. —17 May 1937

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I am quite satisfied with your way of doing the work and it is sure to help you to come nearer to me.

*

I make no difference between work and yoga. Work itself is yoga if it is done in a spirit of dedication and surrender. —25 January 1938

*

Sometimes when I am absorbed in meditation I see and feel that my physical being aspires through work. Then I see a sun manifesting in my physical with its brilliant light. All the gods and forces emanating from You are in this sun.

Yes, it is true that in and through work one can enter into contact with the sun of divine light and force.

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Your attitude towards work is the right one and I see no changes to suggest. The work done through love and because of love is surely the most powerful. —8 June 1942

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Works of love: the best condition for work.

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Let us work as we pray, for indeed work is the body's best prayer to the Divine. —11 December 1945

To work for the Divine is to pray with the body.

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One can progress through meditation, but through work provided it is done in the right spirit one can progress ten times more. —6 April 1954

*

The progress in sadhana comes from the rectification of the inner and outer attitude, not from the nature of the work one does—any work, even the most humble, can lead to the Divine if it is done with the right attitude. —16 July 1955

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It is not so easy to do work. In true work you have to do all that is done in Sadhana and much more. —21 August 1955

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You have to do all that a yogi does, you have to reach the highest heights and bring down those conditions of consciousness, light and peace and manifest them in your everyday work. For you no job is insignificant or trivial. —22 August 1955

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Go and prepare yourself and the best preparation is to be useful to the Divine's work. —May 1963

*

Should I try meditation?

It is not necessary if your work is a constant offering to the Divine. —13 April 1965

*

How can I offer my work?

Usually one works for one's own profit and satisfaction; instead of that, one should work to serve the Divine and express His will. —23 June 1965

*

Whatever is our work and whatever we do, we must do it sincerely, honestly, scrupulously, not in view of any personal profit, but as an offering to the Divine, with an entire consecration of our being. If this attitude is sincerely kept in all circumstances, whenever we need to learn something to do the work more effectively, the occasion to acquire this knowledge comes to us and we have only to take advantage of the opportunity.

*

Now that you are about to take your first steps on the path of action, it is time to decide whether you will consecrate your life to your own personal interest or whether you will make an offering of it for the accomplishment of the work.

In either case the field of action remains the same. But the spirit in which it is done is totally different.

*

It must not be forgotten that the offering is made to the Divine's Work and not to any human enterprise. So the only thing that can be done is to express some appreciation in a few words.

*

What are the steps to follow for (1) sadhana and (2) silence



of the mind?

(1) Do work as sadhana. You offer to the Divine the work you do to the best of your capacities and you leave the result to the Divine.

(2) Try to become conscious first above your head, keeping the brain as silent as possible.

If you succeed and the work is done in that condition, then it will become perfect. —2 April 1970

Be faithful to your ideal and dedicate your work to the Divine.

Work for the Divine and you will feel an ineffable joy filling your being.

Disinterested work done for the Divine: the surest means of progressing.

Disinterested work: work done with no other motive than of doing as well as possible the Divine's work.

How is one to know what the Divine's Work is and how is one to work with the Divine?

You have only to unite and identify yourself with the Divine. —18 Feb. 1933 (CWM, Vol. 14, pp. 319-324)

Progress and perfection in work

You will become more and more perfect in your work as the consciousness grows, increases, widens and is enlightened. —7 October 1934

In all action, all work done, the degree of perfection depends upon the degree of consciousness.

To work in the Divine's way is not easy for a blind and egoistic person like me. By that I mean: to work unegoistically and to keep myself open to your force so that it may work unhampered in me. Am I right?

Yes, it is correct.

Judging by that standard I have no right to work for you at all; but it is also not desirable, perhaps, to cease o work for you.

Certainly you must not stop working for me. It is by working that the perfection of the working comes. —12 April 1947

Try to enjoy doing everything you do.

When you are interested in what you do, you enjoy doing it.

To be interested in what you do, you must try to do it better and better.

In progress lies true joy. —6 January 1952

When work becomes attractive and is done with joy, how much better it is.

It is true that my force is always with him to help him to do his work; but my force is essentially a force for perfection, and to be able to allow it to work fully, one must have a constant will for progress in the work. —12 May 1952

It is by combined and patient effort that all good work is done. —8 April 1954

Perfection in the work must be the aim, but it is only by a very patient effort that this can be obtained. —12 April 1954

Open yourself more and more to the Divine's force and your work will progress steadily towards perfection. —11 June 1954

Let us constantly aspire to be a perfect instrument for the Divine's work. —27 August 1954

Let nothing short of perfection be your ideal in work and you are sure to become a true instrument of the Divine.

There must be order and harmony in work. Even what is apparently the most insignificant thing must be done with perfect perfection, with a sense of cleanliness, beauty, harmony and order. —23 August 1955

With method, order and care there is no difficulty that cannot be solved.

Organisation: indispensable for all good work.

Regularity: indispensable for all serious accomplishment.

For the work steadiness and regularity are as necessary as skill. Whatever you do, do it always carefully.

Always do what you do with care.

Any work done with care becomes interesting.

Nothing is too small to be neglected, the same care meets all circumstances.

To undo one thing in order to build another is not a good policy. Those who are consecrated and want to work for the Divine must be patient and know how to wait for things to be done at the right moment and in the right way. —14 February 1959

It is better to use the energies received from the Divine for perfection rather than for aggrandisement.



The perfection of the work done is much more important than its bulk or the bigness of its scope. —May 1959

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When one works for the Divine, it is much better to do perfectly what one does than to aim at a very big work. —13 May 1959

*

It is better to do well than to do quickly.

*

To begin a work and to leave it half done and to start another work elsewhere, is not a very wholesome habit. —5 July 1959

*

In works, aspiration towards Perfection is true spirituality.

*

Whatever work you do, do it as perfectly as you can. That is the best service to the Divine in man. —1 November 1961

*

I was intending to write to you that this neglected work must be carried out immediately.

I accept your explanation that it is not bad will but negligence. But I must tell you that for me negligence is the worst form of bad will, for it is the refusal to surrender to the divine inspiration and consciousness which demand a constant vigilance.

I hope that this new year will bring you all the breadth of mind and generosity of heart which will make such unfortunate incidents impossible. Blessings. —4 January 1966

*

Faultless planning of work cannot be obtained except with the consciousness of the Divine.

*

If men had to stop work when they are not perfect, everybody would stop working. It is in the work that we must progress and purify ourselves.

Continue to do the work you are doing but never forget that it can and must become better. —23 December 1971

*

To do the work that one does with all sincerity, as perfectly as one can, is certainly one of the best ways to serve the Divine. —18 May 1972

*

When the instruments of work—hands, eyes, etc.—become conscious and the attention is controlled, the capacity for work seems to have no bounds.

*

Skilful hands, a clear vision, a concentrated attention, an untiring patience, and what one does is well done.

*

Skilful hands, precise care, a sustained attention and one compels Matter to obey the Spirit.

*

To know how to observe in silence is the source of skilfulness.

*

Skill in works must be used knowingly. (CWM, Vol. 14, pp. 325-330)

Collaboration and harmony in work

The field of work does not change. What you are doing now, you will continue to do. It is in the attitude in the work, especially in the relation with the other workers, that the change must take place. Each one sees the work in his own way and believes it is the only true way, the only way that expresses the Divine Will. But none of these ways is completely true; it is only by rising above these divided conceptions that one can reach a better understanding of the Divine's Will. This means mutual understanding and collaboration instead of opposition and clash of wills and feelings. —23 May 1934

*

For harmony and better work, it is not by changing men that things can get better, but by changing one's own consciousness and character. —25 January 1937

*

As a general rule it is better not to intervene in things that do not fall within one's own work. —7 October 1937

*

If in the work you meet with some difficulties, look sincerely into yourself and there you will discover their origin.

*

The difficulties in work come not from circumstances or petty outer occurrences, they come from something which is wrong in the inner attitude, especially in the vital attitude: egoism, ambition, fixity of mental conceptions regarding work, vanity, etc. And it is always good, in order to correct the disharmony, to look for the cause in oneself rather than in others. —19 April 1938

*

To recognise the presence of a "disharmonious atmosphere" is useful only so far as it wakes in each one the will to change it into a harmonious atmosphere and to do that the first important step is for each one to get out of his own limited point of view in order to understand the point of view of others. It is more important for each one to find the mistake in himself than to insist on the mistake of others.

I add that all those to whom I have given responsibility in the work are expected to be faithful to this responsibility and, without allowing of any "hurt feeling" to creep in, do their best to carry on successfully their duty.

My blessings are with all those who are sincere and have goodwill.

*

Psychic work: a work governed by harmony.

*

It is only in harmonious collaboration that effective work can be done.

The important thing is to find the point on which you can all agree—and after this is firmly established, each one must be ready to yield his personal will in order to keep intact this point of harmony. —29 March 1966 (CWM, Vol. 14, 331-335)



Poetry room

In the Moonlight¹

If now must pause the bullocks' jingling tune,
Here let it be beneath the dreaming trees
Supine and huge that hang upon the breeze,
Here in the wide eye of the silent moon.

How living a stillness reigns! The night's hushed rules
All things obey but three, the slow wind's sigh
Among the leaves, the cricket's ceaseless cry,
The frog's harsh discord in the ringing pools.

Yet they but seem the silence to increase
And dreadful wideness of the inhuman night.
The whole hushed world immeasurable might
Be watching round this single spot of peace.

So boundless is the darkness and so rife
With thoughts of infinite reach that it creates
A dangerous sense of space and abrogates
The wholesome littleness of human life.

The common round that each of us must tread
Now seems a thing unreal; we forget
The heavy yoke the world on us has set,
The slave's vain labour earning tasteless bread.

Space hedges us and Time our hearts overtakes;
Our bounded senses and our boundless thought
Strive through the centuries and are slowly brought
Back to the source whence their divergence wakes.

The source that none have traced, since none can know
Whether from Heaven the eternal waters well
Through Nature's matted locks, as Ganges fell,
Or from some dismal nether darkness flow.

Two genii in the dubious heart of man,
Two great unhappy foes together bound
Wrestle and strive to win unhampered ground;
They strive for ever since the race began.

One from his body like a bridge of fire
Mounts upward azure-winged with eager eyes;
One in his brain deep-mansioned labouring lies
And clamps to earth the spirit's high desire.

Here in this moonlight with strange visions rife
I seem to see their vast peripheries

Without me in the sombre mighty trees,
And, hark! their silence turns the wheels of life.

These are the middle and the first. Are they
The last too? Has the duel then no close?
Shall neither vanquish of the eternal foes,
Nor even at length this moonlight turn to day?

Our age has made an idol of the brain,
The last adored a purer presence; yet
In Asia like a dove immaculate
He lurks deep-brooding in the hearts of men.

But Europe comes to us bright-eyed and shrill.
"A far delusion was that mounting fire,
An impulse balked and an unjust desire;
It fades as we ascend the human hill."

She cries to us to labour in the light
Of common things, grow beautiful and wise
On strong material food, nor vex our eyes
With straining after visionary delight.

Ah, beautiful and wise, but to what end?
Europe knows not, nor any of her schools
Who scorn the higher thought for dreams of fools;
Riches and joy and power meanwhile are gained.

Gained and then lost! For Death the heavy grip
Shall loosen, Death shall cloud the laughing eye,
And he who broke the nations soon shall lie
More helpless than a little child asleep.

And after? Nay, for death is end and term.
A fiery dragon through the centuries curled,
He feeds upon the glories of the world
And the vast mammoth dies before the worm.

Stars run their cycle and are quenched; the suns
Born from the night are to the night returned,
When the cold tenebrous spaces have inurned
The listless phantoms of the Shining Ones.

From two dead worlds a burning world arose
Of which the late putrescent fruit is man;
From chill dark space his roll of life began
And shall again in icy quiet close.

Our lives are but a transitory breath:
Mean pismires in the sad and dying age
Of a once glorious planet, on the edge
Of bitter pain we wait eternal death.



Watering the ages with our sweat and blood
We pant towards some vague ideal state
And by the effort fiercer ills create,
Working by lasting evil transient good.

Insults and servitude we bear perforce;
With profitable crimes our souls we rack,
Vexing ourselves lest earth our seed should lack
Who needs us not in her perpetual course;

Then down into the earth descend and sleep
For ever, and the lives for which we toiled
Forget us, who when they their turn have moiled,
Themselves forgotten into silence creep.

Why is it all, the labour and the din,
And wherefore do we plague our souls and vex
Our bodies or with doubts our days perplex?
Death levels soon the virtue with the sin.

If Death be end and close the useless strife,
Strive not at all, but take what ease you may
And make a golden glory of the day,
Exhaust the little honey of your life.

Fear not to take her beauty to your heart
Whom you so utterly desire; you do
No hurt to any, for the inner you
So cherished is a dream that shall depart.

The wine of life is sweet; let no man stint
His longing or refuse one passionate hope.
Why should we cabin in such infinite scope,
Restrict the issue of such golden mint?

Society forbids? It for our sakes
Was fashioned; if it seek to fence around
Our joys and pleasures in such narrow bound,
It gives us little for the much it takes.

Nor need we hearken to the gospel vain
That bids men curb themselves to help mankind.
We lose our little chance of bliss, then blind
And silent lie for ever. Whose the gain?

What helps it us if so mankind be served?
Ourselves are blotted out from joy and light,
Having no profit of the sunshine bright,
While others reap the fruit our toils deserved.

O this new god who has replaced the old!
He dies today, he dies tomorrow, dies
At last for ever, and the last sunrise

Shall have forgotten him extinct and cold.

But virtue to itself is joy enough?
Yet if to us sin taste diviner? why
Should we not herd in Epicurus' sty
Whom Nature made not of a Stoic stuff?

For Nature being all, desire must reign.
It is too sweet and strong for us to slay
Upon a nameless altar, saying nay
To honied urgings for no purpose plain.

A strange unreal gospel Science brings,—
Being animals to act as angels might;
Mortals we must put forth immortal might
And flutter in the void celestial wings.

"Ephemeral creatures, for the future live,"
She bids us, "gather in for unborn men
Knowledge and joy, and forfeit, nor complain,
The present which alone is yours to give."

Man's immortality she first denies
And then assumes what she rejects, made blind
By sudden knowledge, the majestic Mind
Within her smiling at her sophistries.

Not so shall Truth extend her flight sublime,
Pass from the poor beginnings she has made
And with the splendour of her wings displayed
Range through the boundaries of Space and Time.

Clamp her not down to her material finds!
She shall go further. She shall not reject
The light within, nor shall the dialect
Of unprogressive pedants bar men's minds.

We seek the Truth and will not pause nor fear.
Truth we will have and not the sophist's pleas;
Animals, we will take our grosser ease,
Or, spirits, heaven's celestial music hear.

The intellect is not all; a guide within
Awaits our question. He it was informed
The reason, He surpasses; and unformed
Presages of His mightiness begin.

Nor mind submerged, nor self subliminal,
But the great Force that makes the planets wheel
Through ether and the sun in flames reveal
His godhead, is in us perpetual.

That Force in us is body, that is mind,



And what is higher than the mind is He.
This was the secret Science could not see;
Aware of death, to life her eyes were blind.

Through chemistry she seeks the source of life,
Nor knows the mighty laws that she has found,
Are Nature's bye-laws merely, meant to ground
A grandiose freedom building peace by strife.

The organ for the thing itself she takes,
The brain for mind, the body for the soul,
Nor has she patience to explore the whole,
But like a child a hasty period makes.

"It is enough," she says, "I have explored
The whole of being; nothing now remains
But to put details in and count my gains."
So she deceives herself, denies her Lord.

Therefore He manifests Himself; once more
The wonders of the secret world within
Wrapped yet with an uncertain mist begin
To look from that thick curtain out; the door

Opens. Her days are numbered, and not long
Shall she be suffered to belittle thus
Man and restrain from his tempestuous
Uprising that immortal spirit strong.

He rises now; for God has taken birth.
The revolutions that pervade the world
Are faint beginnings and the discus hurled
Of Vishnu speeds down to enring the earth.

The old shall perish; it shall pass away,
Expunged, annihilated, blotted out;
And all the iron bands that ring about
Man's wide expansion shall at last give way.

Freedom, God, Immortality; the three
Are one and shall be realised at length,
Love, Wisdom, Justice, Joy and utter Strength
Gather into a pure felicity.

It comes at last, the day foreseen of old,
What John in Patmos saw, what Shelley dreamed,
Vision and vain imagination deemed,
The City of Delight, the Age of Gold.

The Iron Age is ended. Only now
The last fierce spasm of the dying past
Shall shake the nations, and when that has passed,
Earth washed of ills shall raise a fairer brow.

This is man's progress; for the Iron Age
Prepares the Age of Gold. What we call sin,
Is but man's leavings as from deep within
The Pilot guides him in his pilgrimage.

He leaves behind the ill with strife and pain,
Because it clings and constantly returns,
And in the fire of suffering fiercely burns
More sweetness to deserve, more strength to gain.

He rises to the good with Titan wings:
And this the reason of his high unease,
Because he came from the infinities
To build immortally with mortal things;

The body with increasing soul to fill,
Extend Heaven's claim upon the toiling earth
And climb from death to a diviner birth
Grasped and supported by immortal Will.

—Sri Aurobindo

Love's prayer²

Because the Hour is near as the world grows dark
the all-saving Light comes close,
Because all that's asleep needs to be roused,
that which is wrong made good—
Because all would be lost if rescue would be far,
the brave the ready perish if not uplifted at last,
Because cries fill void, which was made for joy, and
All that suffers, withers and dies, have asked
for eternal Life—
Sealed be forever the terrible Pit, and Darkness
return to Light!
O Maker of worlds, Destroying Might, All-Knowing Delight!
give to man of your strength,
for his tired heart your hope,
to fill the dreadful hour when all will be dark
and Light conceals its face.
Let the redeeming stroke be swift, merciful—
the healing balm not slow to come,
Let all tears and cries turn to a smile—
misery to Bliss, I pray!

I too am Man, knower of desolate times, large ordeals,
a multitude of pains—
I too am God, one and many; ever returning, ever sent forth,
my prayers uttered from the lotus of the heart—
render my arms quick to strike, tender to save.
I bow to the Plan, the Will and the Deed
And offer my triple-twined garland at Your feet.

—Georgette Cody



Forward we march³

Forward and onward
Ever we march!
Who dares to defy,
And hold us in bonds?
Heaven's Light is our guide,
Truth, immaculate, is our might,
Love's bright sword
Flashes in our hands,
—We march onward and forward.
Time is our companion;
Right's own golden standard
We have unfurled
Over this wide world.
Nothing can daunt us—
Nothing can make us tame,
For, we are the children of
God's undying flame!
Over rocks of Nescience
And gulf of Hell's wrath,
We march forward and onward,
They fly from our path.
To the New Horizon's rim
Our vision is fixed forever,
Nothing can make it dim.
We march, Heaven smiles;
The Sun and the Moon greet!
Fate trembles helpless,—
As we march with surest feet.
We march—the hordes of darkness
Whimper and sigh!
We march onward always,
And death we defy.
The inevitable goal
Has entranced our soul,
Forward we march!
The children of Light we are,
We move like the morning star!
For we march onward,
We march forward.

Kamalakanto

The wound⁴

Stifled flower, child of the wound
wrought by the world,

you have seen the fear and chill
of the storm

in a glacial haze
of knots

Argil's prayer³

O lift me,
O shift me,
O soak me
In rain
Again and again.
Hold me,
Mould me
On Thy Wheel.
Let me feel
And trace
Thy Grace
In my speck,
Till my crust
As it must
Shake,
And break.
O Lord,
Afford
Me to be
Eternally
Thy cup,
To hold up
The red wine
Of Thine
All-Love.
O bake me
In Thy Fire.
O wake me
Enough
To follow thy desire.
O hush me,
O rush me
High, and higher.
O Lord, let nothing
Ever escape
From Thy breaking
And making
Into a new shape.

Kamalakanto

like the wounded
anywhere, endured the blue

gloom, dwelling
in mourning

angst, your torn
petals yearning

for healing
light

for the wounded trying

—Joseph Kent

Quiet path⁴

In the essential nature of the struggle for liberation
depend on the Divine for acceptance

toward Love and growth. Open in meditation
to higher realms in a subtle, intimate

connection while turning to Light.
channel energy transforming
libido into fine spiritual threads,

embracing higher states of consciousness
in psychospiritual growth, realizing new responsibility
to sustain the Light of luminosity.

One strengthens the nerves
and muscles for creative living, grasps
integral knowledge and guidance,

stays attuned to physical health, psychic
states, develops positive focus
on Light above the fray.

With faintly trembling fingers
along a quiet path,

let body, feelings, mind, and Spirit transmute
into an awareness of transformation
in the midst of expansion.

Be aware of the all but irresistible pull
to the next step, and in due time

open to Overmind easily aware
of a shining new image.

—Joseph Kent



November 11th, 1945⁵

The day I saw your face, my beloved,
There were strange stirrings in my blood—
Your voice ruled out the savage years—
Sky-yearnings confused me in a flood.

The way you spoke my name, beloved,
Severed past pain with a subtle knife—
An unaccountable bell you set a-chiming
And magically I made peace with life.

The way you talked to me, beloved,
The slight touch of your hand on mine—
With eager eyes I would gaze awhile
On your sweet face in dim outline.

Your mere presence near me, beloved,
Set warm quick currents in my heart
Rushing inwardly just for your touch—
Though next to me, you were miles apart.

The times you looked at me, beloved,
Our eyes locked fast in a burning gaze
Quivering I'd let you search my heart
And all earth would melt into a haze.

Rare moments engraved, my darling one,
Unforgettably forever in this heart of me—
Your face, your eyes, your touch, your love
A burning pause, a brief moment turned to eternity!

—Minnie N. Canteenwalla

Sri Aurobindo: The assailer of the nether infinity⁶

A Grace descends, a Beauty's Face unveils,
A Rapture kisses the wounded heart of time,
A Love leans down and plays in the moment's rhyme,
A Power seizes the passion-kings and quells.

The Light withdraws and men fall back once more
Their old familiar ways of life to trace;
The century's march is but a tardy pace,
Near seems, yet far recedes the golden shore.

O thou alone didst see and know the why
Of all this human toil and sweat and tears,
And the hooded Force that all creation sears:
Thy might assailed the nether immensity.

An Epiphany awaits its destined hour
To bathe all Earth and life in a Sun-gold shower.

—Prithwi Singh Nahar

Moment's touch⁷

Immensely calm and most ineffably sweet
Is the regard of those half-blossomed eyes!
How gentle is the pressure of those hands
When the heart bows before her lotus feet!

A moment's touch—what founts of joy arise
Running through dull grains of my life's dead sands
Like a cool stream where once was never shade.
As I stand rapt in that mysterious gaze,
My consciousness is hushed into a deep
Silence; being and thought and universe fade
Into oblivion; this earth-prison's maze
Where in our gilded chains we laugh and weep
Through Life's unending circles, day and night,
Falls off like a leaf torn by a short breath
Of wind; the gurge of violent Time is cast
Into the stillness of a lone sky-height.
I look in those God-eyes that conquer death,
Oceans of love and tides of rapture vast
Mad with a drunkard's joy I quaff and brim;
The finite for this one brief moment drinks
The Infinite.

One moment only, alas!
Time seizes and Space dungeons and the dream,
The deep spell break. I am left on the grey brinks
Of human consciousness—weltering morass
Of a blind ignorance cresseted with desire,
A dark sea with a phosphorescent Fire.

—Nirodbaran

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Apropos

Religion is beginning to realize, a little dimly and ineffectively as yet, that spirituality is after all its own chief business and true aim and that it is also the common element and the common bond of all religions. —Sri Aurobindo

In every religion there are some who have evolved a high spiritual life. But it is not the religion that gave them their spirituality; it is they who have put their spirituality into the religion. —The Mother

Be afraid of nothing. Hating none, giving love to all, feeling the love of God, seeing His presence in everyone, and having but one desire—for His constant presence in the temple of your consciousness—that is the way to live in this world. —Paramahansa Yogananda

My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind. —Albert Einstein

What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God. —Hans Urs von Balthasar

You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do. —Anne Lamott

By reading the scriptures I am so renewed that all nature seems renewed around me and with me. The sky seems to be a pure, a cooler blue, the trees a deeper green. The whole world is charged with the glory of God and I feel fire and music under my feet. —Thomas Merton

A sacrifice to be real must cost, must hurt, and must empty ourselves. Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in his love than in your weakness. —Mother Teresa

Make your own Bible. Select and collect all the words and sentences that in all your readings have been to you like the blast of a trumpet. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

The resting place of the mind is the heart. The only thing the mind hears all day is clanging bells and noise and argument, and all it wants is quietude. The only place the mind will ever find peace is inside the silence of the heart. That's where you need to go. —Elizabeth Gilbert

I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do because I notice it always coincides with their own desires. —Susan B. Anthony

One thing: you have to walk, and create the way by your walking; you will not find a ready-made path. It is not so cheap, to reach to the ultimate realization of truth. You will have to create the path by walking yourself; the path is not ready-made, lying there and waiting for you. It is just like the sky: the birds fly, but they don't leave any footprints. You cannot follow them; there are no footprints left behind. —Osho

The goal of prayer is to live all of my life and speak all of my words in the joyful awareness of the presence of God. Prayer becomes real when we grasp the reality and goodness of God's constant presence with 'the real me.' Jesus lived his everyday life in conscious awareness of his Father. —John Ortberg Jr.

I don't think that God says, Go to church and pray all day and everything will be fine. No. For me God says, Go out and make the changes that need to be made, and I'll be there to help you. —Elvia Alvarado

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize at the center of the universe dwells the Great Spirit, and that its center is really everywhere, it is within each of us. —Nicholas Black Elk

The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it. —Henri J.M. Nouwen

The Holy Land is everywhere —Nicholas Black Elk

Make peace with silence, and remind yourself that it is in this space that you'll come to remember your spirit. When you're able to transcend an aversion to silence, you'll also transcend many other miseries. And it is in this silence that the remembrance of God will be activated. —Wayne W. Dyer

Let nothing disturb you, Let nothing frighten you, All things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices. —Teresa of Ávila

If a man is to live, he must be all alive, body, soul, mind, heart, spirit. —Thomas Merton

Like those in the valley behind us, most people stand in sight of the spiritual mountains all their lives and never enter them, being content to listen to others who have been there and thus avoid the hardships. —Robert M. Pirsig

If you don't behave as you believe, you will end by believing as you behave. —Fulton J. Sheen

The things that we love tell us what we are. —St. Thomas Aquinas

You become mature when you become the authority of your own life. —Joseph Campbell

Religion is, in reality, living. Our religion is not what we profess, or what we say, or what we proclaim; our religion is what we do, what we desire, what we seek, what we dream about, what we fantasize, what we think—all these things—twenty-four hours a day. One's religion, then, is one's life, not merely the ideal life but the life as it is actually lived. —Jack D. Forbes