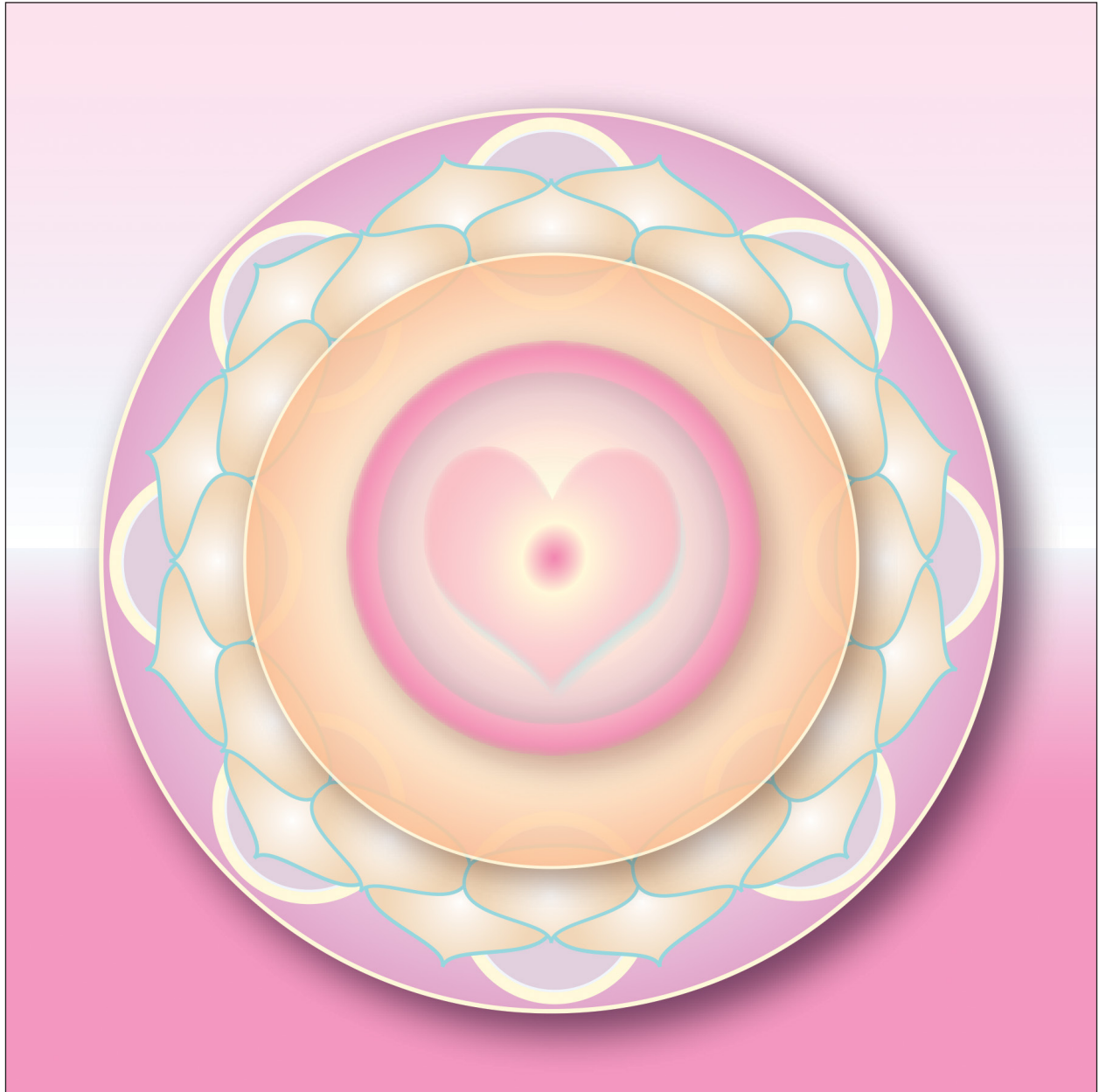


Collaboration

Spring 2015

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 40, No. 1



Life sketch of Jyotipriya by Mandakini Lucien-Brun •
The controversial doctrine of the true, eternal Self in the Buddhist scripture:
The *Māhayāna Māhāparinirvana Sutra* by Dr. Tony Page •
Land and spirit: An American yoga for the 21st Century, *continued* by John Robert Cornell •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry • Apropos



About the cover

Front cover: Circle of Love; back cover: Planes of Existence. These are graphic art designs by Margaret Astrid Phanes (phanes@margaret-phanes.com). A selection of her graphic art can be found at her website: margaretphanes.com. Margaret is a trainer and digital artist who has taught meditation for 30 years in classes, workshops, and conferences. Visual Light-Energy Meditations were first exhibited as framed still images in 1989. Since then, she has produced imaginative presentations of stills and slide animations. These works are a dynamic meditation and a concentration of inner forces of Shakti and presence.

The authors and poets

Alan (alan@auroville.org.in) is a British Aurovil-
ian, and a long-time editor of Auroville Today, Au-
roville's monthly news magazine. He is also involved
with reforestation and organizing workshops on sus-
tainability in Auroville.

John Robert Cornell (johnrobt@cal.net) is a
writer and workshop leader living in California. He is
secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Association, the pub-
lisher of Collaboration, and is associated with the Sri
Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham.

Lord Byron (1788-1824) was one of England's
greatest poets and a leading figure of the Romantic
movement. The poem included here was published in the
anthology, *Poetry for the Spirit*, edited by Alan Jacobs.

Mandakini Lucien-Brun (mlucienbrun@wana-
doo.fr), originally from Brooklyn, NY, now resides in
France where she is associated with AVI-France.

Maggi Lidchi-Grassi (valletta8@hotmail.com)
is a senior Ashram member who founded Quiet, an
Auroville community focused on natural healing. She
is also an author of numerous books.

Michael Miovic (mmiovic@yahoo.com) is a long-
time student of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He lives
in Edina, MN, and works as a consultation-liaison
psychiatrist. He is interested in integral psychology and
geo-spiritual studies.

Dr. Tony Page (tny7tny7@fastmail.fm) is a lec-
turer in English Literature in the School of Humanities,
Bangkok University. He is the author of three books on
Buddhist philosophy, and two books on the scientific
invalidity and immorality of vivisection. He is one of
the UK's leading researchers on the Buddhist scrip-
ture, the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, of which
scripture he is the English-language editor and upon
which he has lectured at the University of London.

Dakshina Vanzetti (dakshina.sasp@gmail.com)
is a founding member of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana
Peetham, an Ashram in California, and President of
Auromere Ayurvedic Imports, the Ashram business.

Table of contents

Collaboration, vol. 40, no. 1, Spring 2015

From the office of Collaboration

Notes on this issue.....	Larry Seidlitz	3
--------------------------	----------------	---

Current affairs

Remembering Ananta	Michael Miovic	4
Activities at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham	Dakshina Vanzetti	5
All USA Meeting 2015.....		5

AV almanac

The Auroville Retreat	Alan	6
-----------------------------	------	---

Chronicles

Life sketch of Jyotipriya (Judith Tyberg)	Mandakini Lucien-Brun	10
---	-----------------------	----

Essays

The controversial doctrine of the true, eternal Self in the Buddhist		
scripture: The <i>Māhāyāna Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra</i>	Tony Page	15
Land and spirit: An American yoga for the 21st Century, <i>continued</i>		
.....	John Robert Cornell	22

Source material

On the Buddhist Nirvana	Sri Aurobindo	31
From <i>On the Dhammapada</i>	The Mother	32

The poetry room

The world game	Sri Aurobindo	34
I should know better	Maggi Lidchi-Grassi	35
From The dream.....	Lord Byron	35

Apropos		36
---------------	--	----



From the office of Collaboration

We open this issue in Current Affairs with a remembrance of the American disciple, Frederic Bushnell, better known as Ananta, who has passed away at the age of 88, written by his friend Michael Miovic. We also have updates on activities at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham and the upcoming All USA Meeting to be held at the Menla Center near Matagiri in August. In AV Almanac, we have an article by Alan of *Auroville Today* on a recent conference that was aimed at breaking through the roadblocks that have stymied Auroville's development over the long-term.

Our feature Chronicles article is by Mandikini Lucien-Brun on the life of Judith Tyberg, whom Sri Aurobindo had named Jyotipriya. Originally written for the Wikipedia website, this is a well-researched, scholarly review of Jyotipriya's life and accomplishments as a Vedic scholar, disciple of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, faculty member of the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco, and later founder of the East-West Cultural Center in Los Angeles.

In Essays, our first article is by Buddhist scholar Tony Page who reviews evidence from an early Buddhist scripture that the Buddha taught and believed in an eternal Self, essentially the same as that of the Vedantic Atman. While *Collaboration* usually does not publish articles about other spiritual paths, we have made an exception in this case because of the importance of this paper in aligning Buddhism more closely with Vedantic thought, and thus to a greater degree with Sri Aurobindo's view. Tony's revelations based on his research are put into a broader perspective in our later Source Material section with selections from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother relevant to this issue.

Our second featured Essay is the fourth installment of John Robert Cornell's unpublished work, "Land and Spirit: An American Yoga for the 21st Century." In this installment, John Robert discusses the work of other authors and poets he was reading while travelling through Navajo territory in Utah and Arizona, who also have explored the spiritual dimensions of the American landscape. He discusses the insights and perspectives of such writers as poets Robert Bly and Kenneth Rexroth, anthropologist Richard Nelson, cosmologist Thomas Berry, mystery writer Tony Hillerman, naturalist authors Barry Lopez and Ann Zwinger, among others. Samples of their writings give us glimpses into the spiritual possibilities of being in close contact with Nature, and reveal to us something of the inspiration underlying John Robert's own perceptions and writing.

We close the issue with a selection of spiritual poetry and *Apropos* quotations.

Invitation to submit a short essay for publication

With the intention to make *Collaboration* more interactive and participatory, we invite you to submit a short essay of about 300-800 words for the next issue on the general topic, "What inspires me about the Integral Yoga." We would like to publish a few of the best submissions in a new section to be called "The Salon." As with the submission of other articles to *Collaboration*, the editor may require or suggest changes to the essay prior to publishing. We hope that the relatively short length of these articles may inspire more writers who may be reluctant to write the longer essays which have become the norm in *Collaboration*. Depending on the response, we hope to include this new section of short articles on a specified theme in each of our future issues. Please email your essay to the editor at: editor@collaboration.org before July 15, 2015.

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*.

Publisher: *Collaboration* (ISSN 0164-1522) is published by the Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA), a California nonprofit religious corporation, 2715 W. Kettleman Lane, suite 203-174, Lodi CA 95242 USA; e-mail: saa@collaboration.org.

Editor: Larry Seidlitz, 39 Vanniar St., Vaithikuppam, Puducherry 605101 India; email: lseidlitz@gmail.com. The opinions expressed in *Collaboration* are not necessarily those of the editor or the SAA.

Copyrights: Copyright © SAA, 2015. Photos of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, passages from their works, and excerpts from the books published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust are © Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust unless otherwise noted, and are used here with the kind permission of the Ashram.

Subscriptions: Send requests to: 2715 W. Kettleman Lane, suite 203-174, Lodi CA 95242 USA, or call Auromere (209-339-3710 ext. 2) with your credit card information; A one-year subscription (three issues) is \$25 (\$35 for airmail outside the USA; a patron subscription is \$50 or more). For India residents, send requests along with Rs. 200 in the name of Larry Seidlitz to: Larry Seidlitz, 39 Vanniar St., Vaithikuppam, Puducherry 605101.

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

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

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



Current Affairs

Remembering Ananta

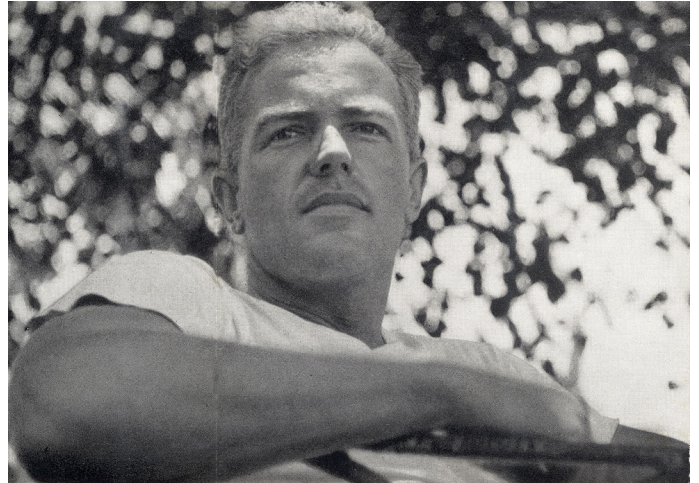
by Michael Miovic

Frederic Folsom Bushnell (1927-2015), called Ananta in the Ashram, left his body peacefully in the early morning hours of April 2, two weeks after his 88th birthday. Raised on Beacon Hill, he dined with the Cabots, Lodges, Storrows and other leading Boston families. He was educated in the classics, loved drama and the Greek gods, and spoke English with the refined accent and grammar of a Boston Brahmin. Eccentric, intense and flamboyant, he defied both common sense and conventional morality, and created his own values. He was both the Mother's most unruly child and one of her most ardent devotees.

After a brief stint in the U.S. Navy in WWII, in the late 1940s Frederic set off for India on a spiritual quest. Following a strict policy of enjoying life's color, he first wandered through the most expensive hotels (and parties) in Europe and then Egypt. Due to Indian visa problems, he eventually ended up in Sri Lanka, where he studied Buddhism and had some initial spiritual experiences. Hearing of Panditji, the Tantric guru who lived in Rameswaram, Frederic crossed the channel to India and actually met Panditji on the beach, where he was initiated into Tantric practice. Remarkably, Panditji instructed him with Greek rather than Hindu deities, because of Frederic's deep love for ancient Greece. He also gave him the name of Ananta Chaitanya (infinite consciousness), the serpent on which Lord Vishnu reclines.

When Frederic finally arrived in Pondicherry in the early 1950s, he heard amazing stories about the Mother, and demanded to see her immediately. She made him wait—thus heightening the dramatic tension of the moment—and when she finally received him, suggested he go check out a weedy snake-infested island she owned south of Pondicherry. He instantly fell in love with the place, and she gave it to him to live on. With the help of his faithful servant, Shingeni, he cleared the grounds, grew beautiful gardens and a coconut grove, and built shrines to the Greek gods. He asked her to name him Zeus, but she concurred that Ananta would be more appropriate, so that became his ashram name. With Her blessings, he continued to study Tantra under Panditji, initially with Debu and Satprem as well, and remained faithful to that discipline for the rest of his life. Or at least faithful, if not disciplined. For true to his name, Ananta was always a protean force in motion, coiling in many directions like evolution itself.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Ananta had quite the scene going out there on his island. He brought his human mother, Sylvia, to stay with him for some time. He hosted dinner parties with Tamil servants dressed in livery, and held extraordinary pujas. As John Mandeon recalls, "he worshiped the Indian god Virabhadra as



Ananta as a young man. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

Achilles backed up by large photos of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He used to get possessed by the force during the pujas, with the nageswaram, drums, fireworks and rockets all going off in celebration." Also, the Mother used to visit Ananta personally on the island every year for his birthday. She oversaw his Tantric practice, and on one occasion sent him a drawing of a secret yantra he was practicing but had not told her about, with the following words: "Ananta's new protection yantra, with my blessings, the Mother."

In the interests of sadhana, the Mother advised Ananta not to come to Pondicherry except on Darshan days. He took this to mean he should follow her advice rigorously on Darshan days, which he did. The rest of the time he had a wide and vibrant social life, including many dear friends in the Ashram, as well as venues in Pondicherry. He was well known to the Pondy police, who helped him home whenever he offered too many libations to Dionysus. In the Ashram, he was beloved for his song and dance routines, and his ability to make the Mother laugh. He was an excellent body builder, dashing handsome, and conducted human relationships according to the laws of quantum entanglement and chaos theory. He vacationed in Kodaikanal when Pondy got too hot, and spent time in rest homes being attended upon when life became too stressful.

On the more serious side, Ananta was sitting at the Mother's feet when she announced the Supramental Manifestation, and the night before (or was it after?) had an experience of rising into the supramental worlds, then falling down into the lap of Zeus. That places him among only a handful of human beings in the world who were aware of the Supramental Manifestation when it happened.

The 1970s was the beginning of a difficult period for Ananta. His sister died, the Mother left her body in 1973, and a few years later his mother Sylvia passed. He sojourned to Switzerland for healing, where he lived with his close friend Carlo Schueller, a devotee of the Mother who hosted many east-west voyagers in his home. Ananta threw himself into the practice of seizures, a difficult branch of yoga that he quickly mastered. He astounded doctors at the Carl Jung Clinic with his prodigious mix of elec-



trical and non-electrical events, and astronomical tolerance for psychoactive substances.

In the 1980s, Ananta returned to the United States for treatment of skin cancer, and his nose was disfigured from surgery. He developed increasing problems with his Indian visa, which eventually barred him forever from his beloved island. However, in 1996 events took a positive turn when he met a naive young psychiatrist named Michael, via the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles. Ananta convinced the good doctor that his last, dying wish was to visit the ancient Mayan ruins in Palenque, Mexico. Michael dutifully accompanied him there, and was surprised to see Ananta suddenly revive. They went on to survive numerous other fatal illnesses, and took many trips to Palenque to experience the remarkable Tantric manifestation there.

Ananta followed Michael to Boston in 1997, and lived with him (between wanderings) until he finally entered a V.A. nursing home. He was a devoted spiritual brother, and taught Michael much about yoga, including the importance of the Gods, laughter, and going on adventures. He also taught him a lot of psychiatry, as Ananta qualified for more than half the diagnoses in the DSM, and was proud of it. As Ananta's health declined, the master of disaster still served the Divine by training V.A. staff in how to care for impossible patients.

In his final year, Ananta experienced the opening of the cellular consciousness, thus fulfilling a prophecy that he would attain his spiritual goal at the end of his life. What a great soul. His friends remember him fondly for his humor, affection, joie de vivre, inspired intuitions, and absolutely outrageous excesses. He opened our hearts, blew our minds, and gave us stories to laugh over forever. A warrior, king and conqueror in past lives, in this life he waged his largest campaign yet—against human nature itself. He may not have won this battle, but he will return and win in the end. For his true nature is Victory, and he will surrender to no power but the Mother. Au revoir.

Activities at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham

by Dakshina Vanzetti

The activities at the Lodi Ashram continue with emphasis on collective yoga practice. We hold collective meditation every night at 8:00 pm and regular study groups on the works of Mother and Sri Aurobindo five days a week, with an Om Choir (and Ma Choir) on Tuesdays. Our resident members explore ways of musical collaboration in addition to our main focus of karma yoga practice. For the last 19 years we have been holding a monthly collective yoga retreat for the wider friend circle of devotees and supporters and their children. Recently we have taken up the exploration of the ranges of consciousness above the mind through the vehicle of *Savitri*. The attendees participate in organizing the retreats and contribute towards manifesting various beautification and con-



Dakshina leads a chant at a monthly retreat. (Photo courtesy SASP)

struction projects around the Ashram. Currently we are working on building a fire pit with benches and flagstone pathway by the yurt. The children's program has taken on inspiring new life with the children themselves taking responsibility for organizing the activities—with adults helping the young facilitators. In 2016, (next year) SASP will be hosting the annual AUM conference in Lodi, which will include a full children's program, and organizational preparations are already underway. Visitors are always welcome to come and participate in the karma yoga activities or for a personal retreat in the sacred atmosphere of Mother and Sri Aurobindo's Presence which is cultivated here with love and devotion. Please see website for more info: <sasp.collaboration.org>

All USA Meeting 2015

We invite you to join us for this year's AUM at the Menla Center for Health and Happiness in Phoenicia, NY, from Thursday, August 20 through Sunday, August 23. Our theme is "Seeds of Light," sharing our personal and institutional stories in manifesting the vision of human unity and spiritual evolution.

This year we have the added delight of having Auroville International (AVI) members join us. Representing Auroville in Europe, Asia, and South America, many have a long and deep association with the community. The AVI board will meet at Mata-giri August 18–19 and give a public presentation on Auroville the evening of August 19 in Woodstock, NY.

Our keynote speaker on Friday the 21st will be Alan Sasha Lithman, a pioneer in Auroville known as Savitra. He will also give a workshop. Other workshops include: JV Avadhanulu: Pranayama and stress reduction; Martha Orton: An exploration of oneness; Shelly McNeal: Integral education; Andrea van de Loo: 12 steps and Integral Yoga; Elliot Landy: Healing workshop.

Music by Nadaka/Gopika will invoke the Divine Presence and inspire our time together. The Vanaver Caravan will also present a celebration of music and dance.

For more information and registration details, see the website: <http://www.collaboration.org/aum/2015/index.html>



AV almanac

The Auroville Retreat

by Alan

Reprinted from Auroville Today, April 2015 issue

The Auroville Retreat, which took place on 12th and 13th March, brought together members of the International Advisory Council (IAC), the Governing Board (GB) and around 160 Aurovilians to examine the present state of Auroville and to draft an action plan for the near future.

It was the culmination of two months of intense work, involving around 300 Aurovilians and 35 thematic work sessions. The original idea came from members of the International Advisory Council. They noted that, over the years, the Governing Board and the Advisory Council had received comments from some Aurovilians about what they perceived to be chronic blockages to our development. The Retreat seemed a good way to test the truth of these perceptions, to identify where the blockages lie and to plot a new way forward.

The stated objectives of the Retreat were: to reconnect and engage with the Auroville vision and its manifestation; to reflect on Mother's vision for Auroville; to introspect and reflect on the spiritual growth of individuals and the collective; to reflect on the present realities of Auroville; and to envision where Auroville wants to be on its 50th anniversary (in 2018) and in 10 years.

The original idea was to focus simply upon governance. During conversations between members of the Governing Board, the IAC and the Vision Task Force this was expanded to include five key areas of Auroville's life: governance, land and planning, growth, education and the economy. However, when it was noticed that youth and the bioregion were under-represented in the preparation groups, these two areas were also added.

The process

The preparation of the Retreat can be divided into four main phases. For the first phase, a resource group was formed in each of five main areas listed above. Over a period of four weeks, each group met four times for three hour sessions. They formulated the key values relating to their area, examined the present reality, identified the main challenges and then came up with insights that could provide new directions towards manifesting these values.

To allow the widest participation, virtual support groups were set up by the Residents Assembly Service to allow all Auroville residents to comment and provide inputs to the resource groups.

After four sessions, each resource group had come up with around 15 to 20 insights concerning their area. To understand the interconnectedness and possible interdependencies, a half-day session was organized during which the insights of each resource



group were shared with all the other area groups.

The next step was to translate these insights into goals and 'milestones' that are measurable and able to be completed within a specified timeframe. To achieve this, a further one day session was organized for each area. The 3–5 major goals, with their associated milestones and timelines, formulated at each of these sessions served as source material for the Retreat.

Meanwhile, the bioregion and youth groups had been working separately. Two short meetings of the bioregion group led to a day-long session during which more than 40 participants drafted a dozen insights. The youth held some preparatory meetings which led to them putting on a "Festival of Ideas" at the Youth Centre, attended by more than 200 people.

The insights of these two groups were also fed into the Retreat process so that their priorities could be included in the drafting of the final goals and milestones.

The Retreat

The drafting happened during the two day Retreat itself. The Retreat began with the chief facilitator, Aromar Revi, Director of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, laying out the purpose of the Retreat. Then the facilitators of each area presented to the plenary the conclusions of their group, along with the facilitators' observations about the process. The youth also made a well-received presentation of their own.

Then participants were divided into small area groups (with participants from the bioregion and youth invited to join one of the other area groups, depending upon their interest). They were asked to focus on a few critical milestones and think about how they could be implemented. Afterwards, the small groups from the same area came together and agreed upon their three most important milestones, or the ones they felt were the most immediately doable.

The next day further steps were taken towards the concrete implementation of milestones. Initially, some individuals from each area group met to identify one milestone from their area to be implemented. They then framed its 'terms of reference'. This involved examining in detail the change that was sought to be made, what was needed to achieve it (including the human resources required) and how progress towards achieving this milestone would be monitored. This simulated the post-Retreat work that would be necessary to realize each milestone.



Each area group then presented their chosen milestone with its terms of reference to the plenary. At this point, Aromar Revi noted that some of the main challenges to their implementation were the ‘elephants in the room’ that nobody wanted to talk about. He proceeded to read out, to enthusiastic applause, a list of these elephants along with their possible syntheses that had been prepared by members of the Retreat Organization Team (see table).

After lunch, a few area groups were asked to present their milestones and answer testing questions from members of Auroville working groups to see how well they could defend their plans. Every participant in the Retreat was also invited to indicate which milestones they would be willing to work upon.

The day ended with Aromar summarising the proceedings and Dr. Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Governing Board, giving an uplifting speech. Noting that Auroville is at a crossroads and needs a major change—“it either breaks through or breaks down”—he observed that he had never seen Aurovilians in a better mood and felt there was a new energy to move forward. And he promised that once the Governing Board received the concrete proposals drafted in the Retreat, “we will do whatever it takes to see that the breakthrough occurs.” The Retreat concluded with the beautiful haunting tones of Chandra’s flute.

Post-Retreat

After the Retreat, the organizing group made a presentation to the Governing Board. It noted some of the goals and milestones arrived at for each topic area, along with the less tangible benefits of the Retreat, and suggested a way of changing our work culture and behaviour.

Subsequently, the organizing group met with the Working Committee. The organizers stated that the group would be dissolving itself after they had completed their report as their work was finished. It was discussed that while the Governing Board and Vision Task Force would retain an overview function, the Working Committee would be the holding body and ultimately accountable for the post-Retreat work, and that task groups would be formed in each topic area to work towards the implementation of the goals and milestones identified in the Retreat. It was also noted that regular evaluations of the progress made in all topic areas would be necessary.

Insights

The Retreat was undoubtedly a major event. It involved a large part of the active community and gained wide general acceptance, a rare occurrence in this community. The many insights and ideas generated during the preparation sessions and during the Retreat itself were often creative as well as challenging, and they can be mined for many years to come (a full report of preparatory sessions and the Retreat can be accessed at ras.auroville.org.in/retreat2015). It was particularly interesting to hear from groups like the youth and those from the bioregion, for the voices of these

sectors of our society are often not heard or are distorted.

The youth, for example, mentioned that the way they are perceived in the community has to change: “we are not here to complain but to work with you.” They requested apprenticeship and mentoring programmes, as well as affordable housing, to allow them to fulfil a more active role in the community, and they plan to set up an Auroville Resource Team as an intermediary between youth who want to be active and the working groups. There was also talk of setting up a Youth Council.

One of the main goals defined by the bioregion group was to include sustainable bioregional perspectives in all our development plans. They pointed out that Auroville and the villages have many things we can work on together (solid waste management, water, organic farming, women’s empowerment, health etc.). However, Auroville should not enforce its priorities but ask the villagers what they want. In this dialogue, Aurovilians from the local bioregion can play a vital role: they can be the ‘bridge’.

However, the bioregion group concluded that Auroville could only work successfully with the local villages if Auroville was united, if Aurovilians were living examples of the Dream, and if the attitude of ‘us’ and ‘them’ was abolished.

There were also important insights from other topic areas. The education group highlighted the need for an organization to promote further learning in the community, and to provide some form of external recognition for the Auroville education that seeks to awaken soul consciousness rather than prepare students for examinations. They defined one of the main education goals as “a learning society of constant progress guided by the emergence of the psychic towards oneness.” The economy group felt we need to develop a culture that supports innovation and diversity, and that Auroville’s economy can only grow if we focus upon our core strengths—research, education, training and environment. The money-driven economy must be replaced by a service-driven economy, and the in-kind component of our present economy must expand to reduce the circulation of money in Auroville. “In ten years Auroville should develop a self-supportive economy that is karma yoga driven.”

The governance group stressed the need to “restructure the existing working groups through a dynamic Residents Assembly that reflects a more vibrant and functional organization which is aiming for change with a sincere commitment to Auroville ideals.” It recommended, among other things, the strengthening of the Residents Assembly Service, an increased involvement of youth in governance through an internship programme, encouraging the role of intuition in decision-making, and the exploration of alternatives to our present ways of meeting.

The group focussing on population growth identified the key as an increase in the “actively-engaged core group” of our community. To do this, the entry process needs to be simplified and support and opportunities provided for those who really want to work for the Dream, particularly the young. This will require a major shift to “a culture of appreciation, collaboration, abundance mindset and proactive action.”



The land, town planning and development group concluded that land consolidation in the city and protection of the Green Belt land use must be made a top priority, that sustainability must become an integral part of our planning, and that co-development with the bioregion on issues like health, education, and work and sports facilities is essential. Tackling the thorny question of whether the building of the city should precede or wait upon upon the developing consciousness of its inhabitants, it concluded that “The planning and development of Auroville as a city and as a society go hand-in-hand.” The group also felt that work should begin on constructing key elements of the Galaxy Plan in the next 5–10 years.

These were only some of the many milestones that emerged from the Retreat process. During the Retreat itself, many of these insights were translated into measurable milestones with specific timelines for manifestation.

The common elements in all these findings included a strong desire to base all activities upon the fundamental values of Auroville, and to find effective ways of including and empowering the young and those from the bioregion in our discussions and our work. The underlying need that emerged was to foster a society of inclusiveness, sharing and trust based upon a common aspiration to live the ideals of Auroville.

Reflections

The stated objectives of the Retreat were, of course, ambitious. However, there was a clear attempt to reconnect with the Auroville vision, to reflect on present realities, and to come up with an action plan for the near future based upon the vision, clear timelines and a reiterative learning process. The success of that plan will ultimately rest upon those few individuals willing to drive change in the key areas identified in the Retreat, as well as upon the support given them by the larger community. (The youth group that formed during the Retreat is already active and has made a further presentation of its aspirations and plans to the community.)

From an organizational point of view, the whole Retreat process was a huge challenge. The initial organizers, the Auroville Campus Initiative group, were asked, on the basis of their experience of organizing the ‘Joy of Learning’ sessions, to coordinate the work of drawing up fact-sheets for each area. The assumption was that this information would suffice for participants to come up with goals and guidelines during the Retreat itself. It rapidly became evident that this would not work, and a whole series of preliminary meetings as well as extensive research were necessary during a short time period to generate the necessary foundation for the event. Organization on this scale also necessitated an expansion of the organizing team to include, among others, members of the Residents Assembly Service, a highly-efficient logistics supremo (Margarita) and a skilled group of ‘techies’ to run the back-office. Without such a formidable and committed team, the Retreat would not have been a success. And, perhaps, may never have happened.

Another person who played a key role in the planning of the Retreat was the chief facilitator, Aromar Revi. Aromar, with his vast experience of high level negotiation at national and international levels as well as his knowledge of Auroville, gave the initial structure for the two days of the Retreat and, when changes needed to be made, proved extremely creative and flexible.

One of the challenges that the organizers never managed to solve was the relationship between the concentrated work of the area core groups and the input from the larger community. The members of the Residents Assembly Service did a magnificent job in involving the larger community but too often, when the core group’s work was opened up to a larger community process, the result was a dilution of energy, repetition of the work done or the ignoring of important insights and proposals. This was not helped by the pervasive misunderstanding of the distinction between insights, goals and milestones, which continued into the Retreat itself.

The facilitators also noted that, while there seemed a remarkable degree of harmony within the groups, this may sometimes have reflected the fact that nobody wanted to surface the ‘elephants in the room’, those subterranean blockages which, time and again, have subverted the community’s attempts to move forward. The decision to expose some of them on the second day, along with an attempt to synthesise some of the main polarities, may have been one of the major psychological turning points of the Retreat, for it offered a possible way out of our dogmatic gridlocks.

There were other hopeful signs. The considerable efforts made to value the contribution of youth—the Retreat began and ended with performances by the youth, and their tables were deliberately placed at the very centre of the hall—resulted in what seemed to be a new sense of self-confidence in them and appreciation by others of what they have to offer as they sat and conversed on equal terms with older Aurovilians.

In fact, the real value of the Retreat may be an immeasurable one. For, by bringing together individuals who do not normally work together—young and old Aurovilians, Governing Board, IAC members and Aurovilians, and Aurovilians who have not been able to sit together for many years due to personal or ‘political’ reasons—the Retreat provided a space both for healing and for something new to emerge. This new dynamic and this ‘softening’ of ancient antagonisms will continue to make its effects felt for many years.

What, more than anything else, made this breakthrough possible was a tremendous collective thirst for change, for a movement forward based upon our ideals. The Retreat, for all its shortcomings—like its overlong, dense presentations and over-reliance upon the mind—relit that flame. It also provided structures, vehicles, for its expression in the years to come. And it provided the assurance, once again, that a community that is united in its desire to live the Dream can accomplish almost anything. As one of the organizers put it, “The main accomplishment of the Retreat was the rekindling of hope in the community.”

Perhaps it was no coincidence that, during the Retreat, ‘Power of Collective Aspiration’ was happily blooming outside the Unity Pavilion...



The 'elephants in the room'

Belief / view / stand	Counter belief / view / stand	Example of Integration that may take us beyond polarities
We are here not to build a city but a society	We are here to build a city, not a society	We are here to build a city and a society, a society manifested in the form of a city.
Auroville must grow organically	Auroville needs to be a planned city	Auroville will be built with plans that allow for flexibility and organic growth within a planned framework
We must build Auroville according to the Galaxy Plan	The galaxy is outdated and we need a new plan	We build Auroville with the galaxy as an urban design concept while ensuring sustainable development that takes into account the natural resources and environment, contemporary insights in building technologies with low levels of embodied energy and urban plans that create a regenerative town.
All lands of Auroville are sacred and should not be exchanged or sold	We need to urgently consolidate the lands of Auroville, starting with the city lands and since we lack funding, some land exchange cannot be avoided	Use land exchange or sales as a means to consolidate city lands and obtain statutory land use protection for the greenbelt lands
The population of needs to grow faster towards the planned population of 50,000	There is no need of population growth. Quality is more important than quantity	Quality and quantity are not mutually exclusive. Quality without a certain quantity does not fulfill the need of a replicable model. Quantity without quality is not sustainable.
In Auroville everything must be decided by the Residents Assembly	We need a centralized strong administration.	The Residents Assembly organizes the work and activities of Auroville by setting up working groups which are empowered to implement their mandates, roles and responsibilities without Residents Assembly interference at implementation level.
Not a single tree must be cut in Auroville.	All trees that have been planted in areas that are earmarked for urban development need to be cut	Many trees were planted to arrest top soil erosion with the knowledge that at some point in the future these trees will have to be transplanted or cut. Respect the built-up / open and green ratio of the city (48% / 52%) and of the green belt (5% / 95%).
In Auroville's education no certificates must be issued.	Certificates in education are needed for higher studies outside Auroville	Do not study for certificates but ask for one if needed as a reference for studies outside Auroville.
In Auroville there should be full freedom in terms of work and commitments	In Auroville there should be even more discipline than in the outside world and everyone needs to work full time for the collective.	Follow the guidelines of the Mother whereby each individual works for a minimum of 5 hours per day, seven days a week, for the collective.
The Auroville economy should be 100% in kind	We are not ready yet for an in-kind economy and need to continue with a money-based economy for some more years.	We can have an economy that works with in-kind currencies such as kWh for energy, liters for water, acres under cultivation for food etc.
There should be no grid power in Auroville and to start with not in the greenbelt	We can have grid power everywhere in Auroville	The question is not grid connectivity but energy sourcing. If we obtain our energy from sustainable sources, the grid functions as a demand-supply balancing system.
There should be a centralized water system for the whole of Auroville	There should be decentralized water systems in Auroville	There can be interconnected local systems whereby the interconnection network balances local demand – supply mismatches.
Auroville must be completed within a time frame (city and society). If we do not hurry up the outside world will crush Auroville or reduce it to a suburb of Pondicherry.	Auroville must develop at its own pace. Timelines and targets do not work here.	Work with plans that include quality, quantity and time parameters and revalidate these plans periodically.
We should first reach the level of consciousness that the Mother wanted in Auroville and only then can we build the town and attract more people.	We have to first build the town and the town will attract more people who will collectively develop the consciousness that seeks to manifest in Auroville	The building of the town and the growth of consciousness will go together. The physical growth of the town will attract people and activities. People and activities will attract physical development. The town with its people is the "laboratory of evolution."
"Mother said..." so we should follow this.	Mother clarified that the truth is evolutionary'	Clarify when Mother is speaking of fundamental principles and when she is indicating an area where knowledge will develop according to the developing consciousness of the Aurovilians
Everybody has a right to participate in decision-making	Only those with proven competence should take decisions.	Allow opportunity for community input, but empower competent individuals to interpret it, provided they keep the community informed of their decisions
Governance should be in the hands of the most enlightened.	Wisdom is distributed across the community so everybody should be involved.	Allow opportunity for community input, but empower competent individuals to interpret it, provided they keep the community informed of their decisions
Empowerment of minorities / disadvantaged'	Meritocracy	As far as possible ensure that all voices are heard and that training in governance is provided to all sectors but do not dilute the quality of people in our key groups
Centralized decision-making	Decentralized decision-making	Centralized decisions made on basis of local input.
Rules / guidelines	Each case is different	Provide broad guidelines which allow for individual interpretation. Empower our groups to make exceptions when needed.
Auroville should keep experimenting with new structures / approaches	We should rely upon old ways until we have the consciousness to use new ones	Encourage widespread experimentation on alternative methods of governance in small groups. When something seems scalable, try it for a probation period in a larger work group with a fallback option to resume 'normal service' if it doesn't work out.



Chronicles

Life sketch of Jyotipriya (Judith Tyberg)

by Mandakini Lucien-Brun

This article was written for and reproduced from Wikipedia

Judith Tyberg (1902-1980) was an American yogi ("Jyotipriya") and a renowned Sanskrit scholar and orientalist. Author of *The Language of the Gods* and two other reputed texts on Sanskrit, she was the founder and guiding spirit of the East-West Cultural Center in Los Angeles, California, a major pioneering door through which now-celebrated Indian yogis and spiritual teachers of many Eastern and mystical traditions were first introduced to America and the West. Judith Marjorie Tyberg was born on May 16, 1902 at Point Loma, the "California Utopia" which was the new world headquarters of the Theosophical Society. [1] Katherine Tingley, world president, founded "Lomaland" in 1898 and Tyberg's Danish theosophist parents, Marjorie and Olaf Tyberg, were among the first joiners. [2] In 1900, Tingley founded the Raja Yoga School. [2] Tyberg recalled how, as young children, they were instructed in the works of the world's great religious and spiritual traditions and were inspired to seek "Truth, Justice, Wisdom ... more knowledge, more light." [1] Early on, Tyberg displayed a serious and philosophical nature and a vocation for education. Madame Tingley called her "one of my true raja yogis." [3] Tyberg grew up, studied, lived and taught at Point Loma until its closing in 1942, and it was in this context that she knew orientalist Walter Evans-Wentz [4] and Paul Brunton. [5]

She received all her educational degrees from the Theosophical University: a B.A. degree in Higher Mathematics and Languages (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Danish and Swed-



Mandakini in Auroville. (Photo courtesy Mandakini Lucien-Brun)

ish); an M.A. in Religion and Philosophy with a specialization in Oriental Thought; and a B.Th and M.Th in Sacred Scriptures and Ancient Civilizations, with a focus on the Bible and Kabbalah. Tyberg began her study of Sanskrit in 1930 with Gottfried de Purucker and received a Ph.D. in Sanskrit studies. She became a member of the American Oriental Society. [6]

While still a teenager, Tyberg began her teaching career at the Raja Yoga School. She held the post of Assistant Principal of the Raja Yoga School from 1932 to 1935, became head of its Sanskrit and Oriental Division in 1940, and served as Dean of Studies as well as Trustee of the Theosophical University from 1935 to 1945. [7] Starting in the late 1930s, she authored numerous articles on spirituality and consciousness for the *Theosophical Forum* magazine, including *The Sacred Texts of the Gupta-Vidya*, [8] *Possibilities of the Kali Yuga*, [9] *Hinduism & Buddhism*, [10] *Where are your haunts of Consciousness?* [11] In 1934, Tyberg joined the team set up by de Purucker to create an encyclopedia of spiritual vocabulary used in theosophy, drawing from Greek, Chinese, Kabbalist, Zoroastrian, Hindu, and Buddhist texts. Tyberg's contribution was the exposition of over 2,000 terms. [12]

First Sanskrit works

Tyberg translated the Hymn to the Origin of the World from the Rig Veda [13] and collated, edited and prefaced Charles Johnston's 1946 translation of Shankaracharya's *Crest-Jewel of Wisdom*. [14] In 1940, Tyberg published *Sanskrit Keys to the Wisdom Religion*, [15] an exposition of over 500 Sanskrit terms used in religious, occult and theosophical literature. This was a groundbreaking work by virtue of its content and its innovative printing technology, as it was the first time anywhere, including India, that the ancient form of Sanskrit was linotyped. Tyberg, in collaboration with Geoffrey Baborka, chief linotype operator at the Theosophical University Press, transformed a modern Sanskrit keyboard into a keyboard for the ancient form of the Devanagari alphabet, composed of dozens of matrices. [12] Tyberg's view of Sanskrit's importance was quoted by the Los Angeles Times: "Not only are the languages used on the European and American continents deficient in words dealing with spirit, but many of the English words that do have spiritual connotations are so weighty with false and dogmatic beliefs that it is difficult to convey an exact meaning to all ... while Sanskrit expresses the inner mysteries of the soul and spirit, the many after-death states, the origin and destiny of worlds and men and human psychology." [16] In 1941, Tyberg continued using her linotype innovation for the publication of the first edition of her *First Lessons in Sanskrit Grammar*. [17] This was a revision of James R. Ballantyne's 1851 grammar which Tyberg prepared in conjunction with Lawrence A. Ware of Iowa State University. Throughout her life, she reworked this text several times, subsequently republishing it in 1950, 1961, and 1977. [12]

India and meeting with Sri Aurobindo

In 1946, Tyberg attended a lecture at the University of Southern California given by S. Radhakrishnan, then Vice-Chancellor of Benares Hindu University,



following which Tyberg applied for a Sanskrit research scholarship at BHU. In her application letter and scholarship request she stated: "I have decided to give my life to the spreading of the beautiful teachings and religious philosophy as found in Sanskrit scriptures ... and I would have the West illumined by its perfect philosophy." Explaining the "small means" earned from her teaching and lecturing, and her "simple way of living," she also expressed her belief that "when one dares and goes ahead with an unselfish heart and is convinced that the work is for the progress of humanity, help does come." The response was a three-year scholarship at the Oriental Division of Benares Hindu University, and Tyberg was made an honorary member of the All India Arya Dharma Seva Sangha.[12]

Tyberg arrived at BHU in June 1947. [12] At her first meeting, Tyberg chose the Vedic religious hymns for her Master's thesis topic. After a twenty-five-year study of humanity's sacred scriptures and seventeen years of Sanskrit, she was convinced that a deep but undiscovered spiritual secret was encrypted in the Vedas' archaic, complex language and that Western explanations of the texts were "nonsense." [19] But, while the Vedas were accepted as the fount of India's spiritual culture, the current view, including in India, held that they were an interesting but "obscure, confused and barbarous hymnal." [20] Tyberg's surprise and disappointment was great when she was thus informed that even the scholars at BHU knew of no one who could help her find this secret, if it even existed. She was advised to change her research topic.

Professor Arabinda Basu, then a young lecturer, overheard this exchange. He followed a crestfallen Tyberg into the corridor, quietly told her that there was someone who could help her [19] and then gave her an as-yet unpublished manuscript of *The Secret of the Veda* [21] by Sri Aurobindo, the revolutionary who, after a series of mystical experiences, renounced politics and founded an ashram in Pondicherry. Tyberg stayed up all night reading, and the next morning, told Basu that she'd

found the object of her lifelong search for truth. On his advice, she wrote to Sri Aurobindo, asking for permission to come to see him. [19]

The invitation that followed led Tyberg to spend two months in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Autumn 1947. On November 24, one of the four days annually when Sri Aurobindo broke his seclusion, Tyberg did her reverence to Sri Aurobindo and to his spiritual collaborator Mirra Alfassa, a Frenchwoman known as "The Mother." Tyberg's diary recorded her experience: "I just felt God," "electric forces," "stretched out to infinity," and "I really knew what was my soul." [22] In a private audience with The Mother, Judith Tyberg asked to receive a spiritual name, which was chosen by Sri Aurobindo himself: "Jyotipriya, the lover of Light." [23]

Back in Benares, Tyberg continued her studies in Sanskrit, Hindi, Pali, the Gita, the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, the Vedantic systems of philosophy and modern Indian thought, leading to an M.A. in Indian Religion and Philosophy. In March 1949, she wrote to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother: "I received the news that I had passed First Class in the M.A. examinations and had made a record for the university.... For the question 'State clearly and briefly the philosophical and religious views of Sri Aurobindo,' I answered fully and enjoyed pouring out my soul in it." [23]

Many eminent Indians, political leaders and yoga masters alike, were impressed with Tyberg's scholarship and her feeling for Indian culture: Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Azad, V. K. Gokak, B. L. Atreya, Anandamayi Ma, Ramana Maharshi, Sri Ramdas, and Krishna Prem, [24] and at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram: Kapali Shastri, Indra Sen, Sisir Mitra, Prithvi Singh, and former freedom fighters-turned-yogis Nolini Kanta Gupta and A.B. Purani, friends she referred to as "the cream of Hindu culture." [25] Tyberg spent a week with the sage Ramana Maharshi at his Arunachala ashram where he told her "You're already realized, you just don't know it." [26] Another lifelong friend was Swami Sivananda alongside whom Ty-

berg served as India's representative to the 1948 World University Round Table. Tyberg was the first President of the International Students Union, founded by S. Radhakrishnan, who called her "a real force in international understanding." [24] Professor T.R.V. Murti declared "I am convinced that you are destined to play an important role in bringing the West and the East together on a spiritual plane." [24]

In Autumn 1949, Tyberg went back to Pondicherry for a six-month stay as a disciple at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. During her two years in India, Tyberg had kept up regular correspondence with an extensive network of American seekers. When certain people criticized this as un-yogic, Tyberg asked The Mother for her view. Her reply was "How do you think the Divine works if he doesn't work through people like you?" and she repeated what she'd told Tyberg at their very first meeting: "You have chosen it, to serve, long ago." [27] After a final reverence to Sri Aurobindo on February 21, 1950, Tyberg recorded her impressions: "Vast deep calm with a mighty wisdom ... his consciousness seemed infinite ... such currents!" [27]

The American Academy of Asian Studies

In April 1950, Tyberg took the boat from Calcutta to California, which included a stop in Hawaii. There she met her old Benares friend Charles Moore and discussed the results of his 1949 East-West Convention of Philosophers. From this, she gathered ideas for an approach to Sri Aurobindo that might readily appeal to the Western mind. [12] Her arrival in Los Angeles was met with enthusiasm, and in just the first two weeks, she gave over ten lectures to more than 1,000 attendees. A similarly packed schedule was organized in San Francisco, where she received an enthusiastic reception at Stanford University. America was eager for "the uncensored truth about India" and, in Tyberg's words, California was "just teeming with interest in Sri Aurobindo." [12] Then, in 1951, Tyberg was invited to join the faculty of the newly founded American Acad-



emy of Asian Studies in San Francisco. [28] The AAAS was the first graduate university devoted to Asian culture, and was considered one of the “principal roots” of the 1960s “San Francisco Renaissance”. [28] Tyberg held the professorship of Sanskrit alongside an international group of colleagues which included Alan Watts, Haridas Chaudhuri, and Dilipkumar Roy. Chaudhuri and Roy were fellow “ardent Aurobindonians” as was Director of Studies, Frederic Spiegelberg, who held Sri Aurobindo to be “the prophet of our age.” [28] Spiegelberg highly regarded Tyberg for her teaching approach which took “Sanskrit as a life force underlying Indian thinking, past and present,” and praised her “superior teaching abilities ... the way in which she understood to make every single class meeting a vitally interesting one.” [29] As an instructor in a Summer 1952 seminar on Modern India at San Francisco State College, Tyberg’s teaching was noted as “exceptionally effective.” “It is perfectly clear that she commands a tremendous range of knowledge and insight into the workings of modern Indian society based on both direct experience and extensive study.” [29] Tyberg also taught as a lecturer at Stanford University. [30]

The East-West Cultural Center

After two years at the AAAS, Tyberg returned to Los Angeles, where on May 1, 1953 she founded the East-West Cultural Center. [31] In line with Sri Aurobindo’s dictum “The Knowledge that unites is the true Knowledge.” [32] Tyberg intended the EWCC to be a “broad and non-sectarian” [31] forum for building cultural reciprocity between East and West as well as presenting a variety of aspects of spiritual life. She single-handedly conducted classes in Sanskrit, Hindi, Pali, and Greek, studies in comparative religion and sacred scriptures, and the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Tyberg organized guest lectures on Indian art and culture, dramatic readings from Indian literary classics, concerts and dance performances. She inaugurated an Oriental Library and bookshop with resources on India’s many

yogic paths. In the isolationist atmosphere of the Korean War, where “those interested in spiritual things are very much in the minority,” her activities were pioneering. [31]

From 1953 to 1973, Tyberg also operated “The East West Cultural Center School for Creatively Gifted Children,” which received full accreditation by the Los Angeles and California school boards. The school promised cultivating “aesthetic and studious habits.” In an echo of her Raja Yoga school training, Tyberg aimed at inspiring children with “the highest ideals” by focusing on their “god-like qualities.” [29] Tyberg singlehandedly taught all school subjects, as well as music theory and piano. Many of her graduates were accepted by leading colleges as much as two years in advance of public school students, and Tyberg’s school is remembered by them as “a wonderful and unique opportunity.” [33]

When the Cold War Fifties gave way to the New Age Sixties, the many years of Tyberg’s avant-garde efforts burst into bloom. With her “My Search for Universality” talks, she was hailed as “one of the South-land’s great women leaders and lecturers.” [29] The East-West Cultural Center became known as the focal point for Southern California’s spiritual activity and its auditorium on Sunday afternoons was the first US launching pad for yogis who went on to have “a huge impact on modern Yoga.” [34] Swamis Muktananda, Satchidananda, Chidananda, Ramdas and Mother Mirabai, [35] Sikh, Sufi, and Buddhist masters from Sri Lanka, Japan, and Cambodia, as well as Indian cultural and political leaders. Tyberg invited noted Western mystics, occultists and astrologers such as Dane Rudhyar and Marie de Vrahnes from Lourdes as well as early health food proponents such as Bernard Jensen. Famed dancers Ruth St. Denis and Indira Devi performed on the EWCC’s stage in those early years of America’s spiritual flowering. [29] It was Tyberg who arranged Swami Vishnudevananda’s Los Angeles program during the time he was also a subject of the early medical research on the effects of meditation, conducted at the University of California, Los Ange-

les. [36] American hatha yoga exponent Ganga White was one of the young seekers attracted to Tyberg’s center. [34] When, on February 28, 1968, The Mother inaugurated the new international spiritual township of Auroville, Tyberg was an ardent supporter of this spiritual adventure and served as an essential informational and connecting link. [37]

Tyberg was known for her “high ethical and spiritual ideals” and for her upright and “high-minded” character. [29] Indian gurus sent their disciples to see her to “be benefited.” [29] However, if there was any insincerity or misrepresentation of India’s spiritual light, Tyberg would be categorical and cut off all aid and connections immediately. “Never speaking against anyone, she would simply say ‘I cannot disclose my reasons, but I assure you they are genuine.’” [38] Part of her challenge and pedagogy was to lead seekers to be able to distinguish between low-level and often fraudulent “psychic phenomena” and the “true psychic” in Sri Aurobindo’s description – the conscious evolution godwards of the soul. [38] Anandamayi Ma dictated a 1959 message to Tyberg saying “how very pleased” she was about Tyberg’s activities. [29] Swami Sivananda wrote: “I greatly admire the solid work that you do for the spiritual good of mankind in a silent manner. This is dynamic Yoga. The whole of America will be grateful to you.” [29]

For Tyberg, the high point of the week was her Thursday evening spiritual satsangs where the focus was the in-depth teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, in her words “the highest path offered.” She wrote to The Mother: “You must know how happy I am to have something so genuine to offer those seeking truth... I just must share my great happiness and blessing with others.” [31] When she spoke, she said she felt a force that would come down in “great swirls” from above her head and get her “centralized to speak.” A long-time devotee explained that Tyberg “did not interpret or ever become vague, or indulge in clichés, but seemed to identify so completely with Sri Aurobindo and The Mother that one felt continually their presence” and how during meditations with Tyberg



“the force was so powerful’ that his body would bend.[39]

In her private office, Tyberg kept a framed personal message from the Mother: “For you who have realised your soul and seek the integral yoga, to help the others is the best way of helping yourself. Indeed, if you are sincere you will soon discover that each of their failures is a sure sign of a corresponding deficiency in yourself, the proof that something in you is not perfect enough to be all-powerful.”[40] There are strong indications in Tyberg’s letter to the Mother of March 8, 1956 that she was one of the very few to have felt The Mother’s February 29 Supramental Descent experience.[41]

“The Language of the Gods” and the last years

One of Tyberg’s last works was *The Drama of Integral Self-Realization*, an illuminating and stirring summary of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual epic poem, *Savitri*, which appeared as a chapter in the 1960 publication, *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo: A Commemorative Symposium*, edited by Haridas Chaudhari and Frederic Spiegelberg.[42] In 1970, Tyberg published *The Language of the Gods*,[42] her culminating opus on Sanskrit’s “wisdom-treasure.” This, along with her accompanying Sanskrit pronunciation tapes,[43] capped 45 years of Sanskrit teaching and scholarship. Tyberg dedicated it “In Reverent Memory of Sri Aurobindo” and wrote in her preface: “In this age when men are responding to a spiritual need for unity and brotherhood among all the nations of the world, we find a spiritual vocabulary being drawn from the rich treasury of Sanskrit terminology because these words are already ripe with truths divine.”[44] In her “Plan of Study Recommended,” Tyberg specified: “a stress has been given to the verb-roots of the words, for they are the essential carriers of the meaning of the words as originating in the spiritual element of the Universe” and in this way the student can “get at the real meaning of the word, free from the loaded implications that so many

words have come to possess because of religious dogma and a misunderstanding due to lack of spiritual experience.”[45]

The book had a double introduction, by both B. L. Atreya and V. K. Gokak. Atreya praised the unique combination of Sanskrit and Hinduism,[46] while Gokak lauded Tyberg’s “ceaseless search for Truth” and her “burning desire to communicate to other aspirants what vision of Reality she herself attained through her study” of the mystical and philosophical terms which “help us to map out precisely the realms of the superconscient in man.”[47] The work was widely reviewed in India: *The Indian Libertarian* wrote: “Dr. Tyberg has woven for us a magnificent fabric of primary source materials of the highest authority,” and *The Indian Review* hailed the “novel approach and sincerity of scholarship” ending with the words “Dr. Tyberg has laid all lovers of Sanskrit under a debt of gratitude.”[48] In *Mother India*, Sanat K. Banerji admired Tyberg’s “boldness and originality” and particularly commended three major innovations: “within a reasonable compass, practically all the important terms that a students of (India’s) most valuable works is likely to come across,” the relating of “technical terms to the verbal roots from which they are derived” and the “signal service” which he felt must be emphasized: “Vedic interpretation has long suffered at the hands of scholars wholly ignorant of the spiritual endeavours the Vedas were meant to enshrine. The author has a valuable chapter on the Vedas and their spiritual meaning ... compiled from Sri Aurobindo’s monumental work on the subject.” The review finished with the words: “Dr. Tyberg has justified the name Jyotipriya given her by Sri Aurobindo.”[49]

In 1972, Tyberg’s finances finally permitted a last trip to see The Mother on the occasion of the Sri Aurobindo Centenary celebrations.[39] Despite the constant arthritic pain that afflicted her body, Tyberg kept “cheerfully going on” as she often said, managing the EWCC’s rich diversity of activities while continuing to provide spiritual teaching and personal counseling, always for free.[29] She accepted new

professorships: at the College of Oriental Studies (1973),[39] as Emeritus Staff Professor of Buddhist Studies at the Buddha Dharma University (1973),[50] and as Professor of Sanskrit and Hinduism for the Goddard College Graduate Field Faculty (1975).[39] One academic reference attested “Tyberg’s lectures were distinguished by wide reading and research; and even more than this, she imparted to her students and hearers the spiritual aroma and inspiration of the great philosophical schools of the East.”[29] Tyberg often said that it was in the joy of teaching that she transcended all pain.[39]

In 1978, Tyberg was able to make the ultimate mortgage repayment on the EWCC building and drew up a “guidance” letter of ideals and principles for EWCC’s new Board of Directors “as the New Age unfolds.” “This Center is not a business or a sect or a popular or social activity. It is a service to the Divine to share and unite the best aspects of the spiritual and religious, philosophical and cultural and healing arts of the East and West for uplifting and leading to a Divine Life on Earth.... May it continue to grow thus spontaneously with Divine backing with no catering to lower standards for attracting money.”[29]

Judith Tyberg expired on October 3, 1980.[41] After a life where she sought “long service ... in search of truth, beauty and joy to share with all,” her final aspiration was “the speedy return of my soul to the Divine ... so I may return again to serve the Light.”[51] Her Sanskrit books continue to be used as basic texts in Sanskrit classes,[52][53][54] and the The East West Cultural Center, the child of Tyberg’s decades of pioneering and dedicated service, continues to exist as the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles.[55]

References

1. Mandakini February 1981, p. 92.
2. Small September 2010, p. 5.
3. Ashcraft 2002, p. 85.
4. Small October 2010, p. 12.
5. “Paul Brunton and Blavatsky”. Religion and Spirituality Resources. Retrieved November 22, 2014.



6. Mandakini February 1981, p. 94.
7. Mandakini February 1981, p. 93.
8. Tyberg January 1938.
9. Tyberg August 1938.
10. Tyberg March 1944.
11. Tyberg May 1943.
12. Mandakini 2011.
13. Tyberg March 1943.
14. Sankaracharya 1946.
15. Tyberg 1940.
16. San Diego Union 1940.
17. Tyberg 1977.
18. Ashcraft 2002, p. 106.
19. Mandakini March 1981, p. 158.
20. Kapali Shastri 1989, p. 64.
21. Sri Aurobindo 1956.
22. Mandakini March 1981, pp. 158-159.
23. Mandakini March 1981, p. 159.
24. Mandakini March 1981, p. 160.
25. Mandakini March 1981, p. 161-162.
26. Mandakini March 1981, pp. 161.
27. Mandakini March 1981, p. 162.
28. "The American Academy of Asian Studies". From the CIIS Archives. Retrieved November 14, 2014.
29. "Jyotipriya's Letters". Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles. Retrieved November 20, 2014.
30. Mandakini April 1981, p. 211.
31. Mandakini April 1981, p. 212.
32. Sri Aurobindo The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 341.
33. Mandakini April 1981, pp. 213-214.
34. "Spiritual History of Los Angeles". Param Yoga. Retrieved November 14, 2014.
35. Mandakini April 1981, p. 214.
36. "People are Waiting". Yoga Life. Retrieved November 14, 2014.
37. Mandakini April 1981, pp. 214 & 217.
38. Mandakini April 1981, p. 216.
39. Mandakini April 1981, p. 217.
40. Mandakini April 1981, p. 210.
41. Mandakini April 1981, p. 218.
42. Tyberg 1960.
43. "Lessons in Sanskrit pronunciation". East-West Cultural Center. Retrieved November 22, 2014.
44. Tyberg 1970, p. iii.
45. Tyberg 1970, p. xi.
46. Tyberg 1970, p. v.
47. Tyberg 1970, p. vii-viii.
48. "Editorial Reviews". Amazon.com. Retrieved November 14, 2014.

49. Banerji 1972.
50. "Graduate Alumni". Buddha Dharma University. Retrieved November 14, 2014.
51. Mandakini April 1981, p. 219.
52. "Summer Courses". Hindu University of America. Retrieved November 14, 2014.
53. "Sanskrit Studies". Vedanta Press. Retrieved November 14, 2014.
54. "Sanskrit Language". Study-Theosophy.net. Retrieved November 14, 2014.
55. "Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles". Retrieved November 14, 2014.

Bibliography

Ashcraft, Michael (2002). *The Dawn of the New Cycle: Point Loma Theosophists and American Culture*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press.

Sri Aurobindo, Sri (1956). *The Secret of the Veda*. Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

Sri Aurobindo, Sri (1992). *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press.

Banerji, Sanat K. (February 1972). "Books in the Balance". *Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram).

Kapali Shastri, T.V. (1989) [1947]. *Lights on the Veda*. Pondicherry, India: Dipti Publications, Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Mandakini, (Shaw, Madeleine) (February 1981). "Jyotipriya (Dr. Judith M. Tyberg), Part 1". *Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram).

Mandakini, (Shaw, Madeleine) (March 1981). "Jyotipriya (Dr. Judith M. Tyberg), Part 2". *Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram).

Mandakini, (Shaw, Madeleine) (April 1981). "Jyotipriya (Dr. Judith M. Tyberg), Part 3". *Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram).

Mandakini, (Shaw, Madeleine) (2011). "Jyotipriya, a Tribute". Blog (Los Angeles, CA: Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles).

Sankaracharya, (translation by

Charles Johnston) (1946). *The Crest-Jewel of Wisdom*. Point Loma, CA: Theosophical University Press.

Small, Ken (September 2010). "Raja Yoga Education". *Theosophy World* (Online publication).

Small, Ken (October 2010). "Raja Yoga Education". *Theosophy World* (Online publication).

Tyberg, Judith (January 1938). "The Sacred Texts of the Gupta-Vidya". *The Theosophical Forum* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press).

Tyberg, Judith (August 1938). "Possibilities of the Kali Yuga". *The Theosophical Forum* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press).

Tyberg, Judith (1940). *Sanskrit Keys to the Wisdom Religion*. Point Loma, CA: Theosophical University Press.

Tyberg, Judith (November 26, 1940). "Only Sanskrit Linotype made by Theosophists". San Diego Union (San Diego, CA).

Tyberg, Judith (March 1943). "Rig Veda X, 129". *The Theosophical Forum* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press).

Tyberg, Judith (May 1943). "Where are your haunts of Consciousness?". *The Theosophical Forum* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press).

Tyberg, Judith (March 1944). "Hinduism & Buddhism". *The Theosophical Forum* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press).

Tyberg, Judith (1960). "The Drama of Self-Realization: The Spiritual Message of Savitri". In Chaudhari, H.; Spiegelberg, F. *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo: A Commemorative Symposium*. London, UK: George Allen & Unwin.

Tyberg, Judith (1970). *The Language of the Gods*. Los Angeles, CA: East-West Cultural Center.

Tyberg, Judith (1977). *First Lessons in Sanskrit Grammar and Reading*. Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press.



Essays

The controversial doctrine of the true, eternal Self in the Buddhist scripture: the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*

by Dr. Tony Page

Abstract

Although not generally well known, there exists in Buddhism a positive stratum of affirmative teaching on a True Self (contrary to the usual ‘no Self’ doctrine promulgated by that religion). This cataphatic teaching of a real, deathless Self can be found in the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* and in the declarations of some notable Buddhist monks—namely, Dolpopa of Tibet and Maha Boowa of Thailand. The present article seeks to redress the balance regarding ‘Self’ teachings within Buddhism, and focuses largely upon the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*.

1. Introduction

The widespread view in scholarship and in popular understanding of Buddhist doctrine is that the Buddha denied the Self or Soul (the *ātman*) or any underlying, enduring essence (*svabhāva*) in any and all sentient beings. According to this interpretation, he expressed such denial both in the Pāli suttas (the earliest-preserved Buddhist scriptures) and in the Mahāyāna (allegedly more advanced) sūtras. For the Buddha—according to the orthodox understanding—a living being is merely composed of the five ‘skandhas’ (constituent elements) of body, feeling, cognition, volition, and consciousness. There is nothing perduring underlying them or beyond them.

Is this extreme, nihilistic denial of Selfhood, however, a full and flawless



(Photo courtesy Tony Page)

representation of what the Buddha actually taught? Is it in fact accurate to claim that Buddhism denies, tout court, an immanent and eternal Self? Is there not at least one major Mahāyāna scripture which speaks affirmatively of the reality of the Self, the *ātman*? I suggest that there is, and that this scripture is the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*. Teachings by the Tibetan monk, Dolpopa, and the recently deceased Thai forest monk, Maha Boowa, also contain affirmative statements on the Self. In this study, we shall look briefly at both.

2. The *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*

The *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* claims to be the final Mahāyāna teachings of the Buddha, delivered on the last day and night of his physical life upon earth. As such, it constitutes an alleged final and definitive summation of the Buddha’s Dharma from a Mahāyāna perspective.

The sūtra survives in its Sanskrit form only in some ten fragmentary pages. Fortunately, the scripture was translated into Tibetan and Chinese. The shortest and earliest extant translated version is the translation into Chinese by Faxian and Buddhahadra in six *juan* (418CE); the

next in terms of scriptural development is the Tibetan version (c790CE) by Jinamitra, Jñānagarbha and Devacandra; and the lengthiest version of all is what is known as the “Northern version” in 40 *juan* by Dharmakṣema (422CE). I shall quote from all three versions in this paper, using both Kosho Yamamoto’s English translation of the Dharmakṣema, as well as the as-yet unpublished English translations by my friend and scholarly colleague, Stephen Hodge, of the entire Tibetan version—a translation which I myself commissioned—and of parts of the Faxian. Stephen Hodge has generously supplied these translations for my specific use in research articles such as this.

Early in the sūtra (Tibetan version), in Chapter Three, ‘Grief’, the Buddha is confronted by a number of zealous Buddhist monks who are keen practitioners of what we might term “absolutist non-Self Buddhism”—i.e., the frequent meditative cultivation of the notion that absolutely everything is transitory, afflicted with suffering and is ‘not Self’ (*anātman*). To the monks’ surprise, the Buddha does not laud them for their zealous following of his ‘non-Self’ teaching, but rather criticises them for their “extremism”. He even dismisses as “mistaken and worthless” their proud non-Self meditations and scolds them for failing to realise that meditation upon impermanence, suffering and non-Self is “highly contingent” and needs to be kept within certain bounds.

According to the Buddha, the monks have grasped only the outer letters, the externalities, of his doctrine, but not its essential spirit or inner meaning. They have fallen victim to an extreme and inverted form of meditative practice in which they regard what is Eternal as transient, what is really the Self as not—the-Self, what is wholly blissful as prone to suffering, and what is primordially and immaculately pure as something impure. They have not made the requisite distinction between *samsāra* (the changeful, reincarnational processes of our phenomenal universe) and Great Nirvāna (*mahā-nirvāna* or *mahā-parinirvāna*). *Samsāra* is non-Self—thus far the monks are right. But they have



fallen into grave metaphysical misperception, the Buddha indicates, by ascribing samsaric qualities and characteristics to the non-samsaric, to unconditioned Nirvana, indeed to the Buddha himself. For while everything samsaric is rightly labelled as “non-Self,” the Buddha reveals in the course of the sūtra that he, as the *dharmakāya* (unbegotten, deathless body of Cosmic Truth), is nothing less than the eternal Self (*ātman*) itself.

In the “Grief” chapter, the Buddha explicates what he means by ‘Self’, eternality, happiness, and purity: ‘The Self’ signifies the Buddha; ‘eternal’ signifies the *dharmakāya* [ultimate Body-and-Mind of the Absolute]; ‘happiness’ signifies Nirvana; and ‘pure’ is a synonym for the Dharma. (Hodge, 2006, p. 39) The Buddha declares that it is in fact wrong to state that all dharmas [phenomena] are non-Self, and, in the Dharmaksema translation, he declares that “in truth there is Self [*ātman*] in all dharmas” (Yamamoto/Page, 1999, Vol. 1, p.46). Offering an exceedingly rare (within Buddhist sutric literature) characterisation of what the nature of this Self in fact is, the Buddha states:

The Self (*ātman*) is reality (*tattva*), the Self is permanent (*nitya*), the Self is virtue (*guna*), the Self is eternal (*śāśvatā*), the Self is stable (*dhruva*), the Self is peace (*śiva*). (Hodge, 2006, Chapter Four, “Grief”, p. 40).

In the Faxian and Dharmaksema versions, another quality is found listed here: that the Self is “sovereign,” “self-governing” or “autonomous” (*aiśvarya*). Furthermore, Faxian includes the adjective “unchanging”/“untransforming”/“non-mutating” (*aviparināma*), while Dharmaksema also adds that the Self is “true” (*satya*).

It is sometimes claimed by scholars who comment on the doctrine of the Self in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* that when the Buddha speaks of the *ātman*, he is only doing so in a concessionary manner, as a provisional, tactical manoeuvre for those students who are not yet ready to face up to the frightening enormity of the non-Self and Emptiness (i.e. nothing has an

essence) doctrines, and that what he really wishes to say is that there actually exists no Self at all. We shall come back to the question of whether this text views itself as provisional or ultimate in its doctrines a little later, but for now, it needs to be emphasised that for the Buddha to assert something to be *satya* and *tattva* (both adjectives appear alongside one another in the Dharmaksema text) is tantamount to his insisting that it truly is Real—not just apparently real or deceptively authentic. The term, *tattva*, woven into such metaphysical verbal fabric as the present context—where rectification of a misapprehended nonSelf doctrine is centre-stage of discussion—would seem to suggest a genuine, ultimate Reality, rather than some provisional, metaphorical notion or accommodating simulacrum of Truth.

Let us consider a number of the other epithets applied to the True Self in the passage just quoted. First is the notion of the “eternity” or “permanence” of the Buddha (who is, we must remember, the True Self, according to this scripture). The Sanskrit term, *nitya*, forcefully expresses the idea of eternal continuance and perpetual persistence throughout all time and beyond. The Self that is *nitya* is not just real for a million years or even a billion kalpas (aeons). It is real and lasting always. So central is this concept of the *nityatā* or eternity of the Buddha in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* that the Buddha at one point refers to this scripture as “the great sūtra of the Buddha’s eternity” (*nityatā*) (Hodge, 2006, p. 141, Chapter 17, “The Bodhisattva”). Perpetual Buddhic Reality lies at the heart of the message which this sūtra seeks to deliver, as an antidote to the prevalent Buddhist notion of universal change, flux and death. Buddhas, by contrast, know of no cessation: “the Tathāgata [Buddha] has no death” (Hodge, 2006, Chapter 16, “The Analogy of the Moon”, p. 131); and “do not harbour the idea that Tathāgata-Arhat Samyak-Sambuddhas [utterly perfect buddhas] ever reach an end! ... You should understand that the Tathāgata [i.e. Buddha] is unchanging, stable and eternal” the Buddha insists (Hodge, 2006, Chapter Five, “Long Life”, p. 48.) The Bud-

dha’s physical body will die, that is true; but that physically manifested body is in any case deceptive and impermanent, the Buddha says. He himself, in contrast, as the True Self will not decline and reach any final cessation of being.

Closely linked to the concept of *nityatā* are the ideas of immovable, unshakeable fixedness or firmness (*dhruva*) and “unchangingness” (*aviparināma*). The notion of *aviparināma* is found in both Faxian and Dharmaksema in the passage upon which we are commenting. While Faxian uses it in its naked and unmodified form, however, the Dharmaksema text combines it with the term, *āśraya* (“basis,” “ground,” “body” or “foundation”), to create the compound, *āśrayaaviparināma*. Thus the “foundational body” which is the Self is here asserted to be immutable—the opposite of everything else known to mankind, which is subject to modification and mutation. The *ātman* never transforms. It is present within all dharmas (so the Dharmaksema text tells us)—a base which never transmutes into something else. Self is—we might say—always and unchangingly itself. It is the irreducible, untransforming foundation or essence of Reality. This is the teaching of the Buddha in the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. And it is a teaching that is never revoked.

If the Self does not mutate or transform, then it is impossible for it to be killed, since it cannot undergo the transformation inevitably brought about by death. Accordingly, in the Faxian version of the sūtra, we find the expressive epithet “not-rubbed-out” used of the *ātman*. The likely Sanskrit term underlying this is *aparimardana*, which means “not rubbed out”, not obliterated, not broken up or destroyed. We are perhaps reminded here of the colloquial English expression of “wiping someone out” or “rubbing someone out” to convey the idea of killing them. But unlike what the Buddha calls the “lie” of the worldly ego’ reality—an ego made up of the five transforming and transient skandhas (mutable components of body and mind), all doomed to dissolution and death,—the true *ātman* can never be “rubbed out” or erased. It endures—undi-



minished and unperishing—forever.

Finally in this section, let us consider an adjective found both in Faxian and Dharmakṣema to characterise the Self: “sovereign,” “governing” or “autonomous” (*aiśvarya* in Sanskrit). Not only do we encounter the term in the present passage, but we also encounter it scattered across the Dharmakṣema text as a whole. For example, we read that “... on the morning of Buddhahood, he [the Bodhisattva] obtains the sovereign Self” (Yamamoto/Page, 2000, Vol. 5, “On Pure Actions,” p. 60), and on the all-pervasive presence of the Buddha, who cannot truly be seen and yet can cause all to see him, the Buddha comments that “Such sovereignty is termed ‘the Great Self’ (*mahātman*)” (Yamamoto/Page, 2000, Vol. 7, “Bodhisattva Highly Virtuous King,” p. 29). This word, *aiśvarya*, is important for two reasons: first, it attests the complete self-governance and freedom of the Self—it is not subject to the tyranny of undesirable internal or external forces (unlike the mundane ego comprised of the conditioned and labile skandhas); the word is, in fact, linguistically and connotatively closely linked to the term *Īśvara* (God), which should not escape our notice; and second, it hints at a controlling, regulating (divine) intelligence: a knowing and utterly free mind, the “transcendental awareness”—*lokkottara-jñāna*—which the Buddha elsewhere in the sūtra links to the Self.

So the True Self is revealed by the Buddha in this important excursus on the authentic ātman to be that totally self-governing, sovereign foundation or ground of Reality which is untrammelled by change and unmarked by mutation and which endures eternally, utterly unassailable by death. The sūtra also (in its somewhat later chapters) intimately links this Buddhist Reality to the *tathāgata-dhātu*, *buddha-dhātu*, or *tathāgata-garbha*, the ‘Buddha-Womb’ or ‘Buddha Essence’ as the immanent core or quintessential nature of Buddhahood. And to this we must now turn.

In the chapter entitled, “The Tathāgata-garbha”, the Buddha declares to Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva Kāśyapa (I quote

from Faxian, Hodge, 2005, p.1):

The True Self is the *tathāgata-dhātu* [Buddha Principle, Buddha Nature, Buddha Factor]. You should know that all beings do have it, but it is not apparent, since those beings are enveloped by immeasurable kleśas [defects of mind, morality and character]

The keen young Bodhisattva will have none of this, however, and mounts a vehement, verbal assault on the Buddha in an attempt to shore up the validity of the general non-Self doctrine, attempting to argue for the total illogicality and impossibility of a real Self. Does the Buddha at this point then make concessions or withdraw his revelation that the True Self is the indwelling Buddha-Principle within all beings? No. He strengthens his claim—by telling the tale of a rather dim-witted wrestler who falsely believes he has lost a valuable jewel, which he always wore fastened to his forehead, when in fact it has merely been driven under his flesh by the force of his engagement in a bout with a rival wrestler. The Buddha states (Faxian):

All beings are also like this. Each one of them has the *tathāgata-dhātu*, but, through having recourse to evil acquaintances, they give rise to attachment, hatred and stupidity and fall into the three miserable states ..., adopting various kinds of bodies throughout the twenty-five modes of existence. The precious jewel that is the *tathāgata-dhātu* is buried within the wound of the kleśas of attachment, hatred and stupidity, so that they are unaware of its presence there. Engaging in the notion that there is no Self with regard to the mundane self, they do not understand the skilful words of implicational intent of the Tathāgata ... They have the notion that there is no Self and are unable to know the True Self. Regarding this, the Tathāgata ... utilises skilful means: he causes them to extinguish the raging fires of the countless

kleśas, revealing and elucidating the *tathāgata-dhātu* to them ... (Hodge, 2005, p. 2)

At this point, the Tibetan version adds (Hodge, 2006): “The *tathāgata-garbha* is the intrinsic nature [*svabhāva*] of beings.” The Faxian text continues:

The *tathāgata-dhātu* cannot be killed. Those who die are said to be shortlived, while the *tathāgata-dhātu* is said to be true life. It cannot be severed or destroyed right up to the attainment of Buddhahood. The *tathāgata-dhātu* can neither be harmed nor killed, but only nurtures / sustains the person ... Furthermore, noble son, it is like a person who digs the earth searching for diamonds. Holding a sharp pickaxe in his hands, he digs into the ground and rocks, able to pulverise them all. Diamonds alone he cannot shatter. The *tathāgata-garbha* is like this, for it cannot be harmed by the sharp weapons of the devas and maras (gods and devils). It only nurtures the person, and anything that can be harmed or damaged is not the *tathāgata-dhātu*. Hence, you should know that the *tathāgata-dhātu* cannot be harmed or killed. (Hodge, 2005, p. 3).

Moreover, the application of the notion of non-Self and a misplaced attachment of the idea of Emptiness to the *tathāgata-dhātu* is firmly advised against by the Buddha earlier in the sūtra, where he declares in very striking terms (I quote from the Tibetan text, from Chapter 11, “The Four Truths”):

By having cultivated non-Self with reference to the *tathāgata-dhātu* and having continually cultivated Emptiness, suffering will not be eradicated, but one will become like a moth in the flame of a lamp. (Hodge, 2006, p. 107)

Let us extract some key points from the foregoing:

1) As with the earlier situation, in



which the Buddha had been challenged by a group of absolutist non-Self monastics, he is here being skeptically interrogated by a great Bodhisattva on the validity of the Self idea. But the Buddha stands firm: there is a Self, and that Self is the Buddha.

2) There is not a trace of evidence in these key encounters—nor indeed in the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* as a whole—that the Buddha only spoke of a True Self in order to win over those who dearly and desperately wanted to believe in an everlasting *ātman*—as is claimed by some commentators on this sūtra. Quite the opposite. While on one occasion he does speak of the Self to a group of wandering non-Buddhist ascetics, he overwhelmingly speaks in this scripture of the True Self to his own advanced monks and high-level bodhisattvas.

3) It is shown as a deficiency in comprehension on the part of the Buddha's would-be followers (and by implication, equally those of today) when they take his non-Self teachings as universal in their sphere of reference; instead, such persons should understand that the non-Self doctrine has certain limits inherently imposed upon it and contains an implicit counter-pole (at least within this particular scripture) which the Buddha asserts—namely, that of the True Self. It should be noted, however, that Sallie B. King (King 1997, p. 190) argues that the Buddha Nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) is simply and solely a 'skilful means' to encourage students to practise more enthusiastically; it is merely a 'soteriological device and is ontologically neutral', she contends. Yet this claim is not particularly meaningful or accurate. Its first part resolves itself, on further consideration, into a trite truism, since all of the Buddha's teachings can ultimately be viewed as a methodology for salvation, as skillfully constructed means towards liberation. Its second contention – that the Buddha Nature has no explicit ontology or genuine 'being' to it—is contradicted by such statements of the Buddha's as 'the *tathāgata-garbha* is the *svabhava* [core essence] of beings' (Hodge, 2006, p.); "The *buddha-dhātu* of beings abides within the five skandhas." (i.e. is distinct from the

constitutive elements of the non-Self), '...you should henceforth bear in mind that the Tathāgata's body is indestructible and solid like a diamond' (Hodge, 2006, p. 50), and "The *buddha-dhātu* is the True Self and, like a diamond, for example, it cannot be destroyed" (Yamamoto/Page, 1999, Vol. 3, p. 3). We might further note that in the original Sanskrit version of the text (preserved in fragments only), the adjective *acala* is applied to the Buddha (Habata 2007, p. 87). This word means 'unmoving', 'immovable', and when used as a noun betokens 'mountain'. A strong indicator, this, of the Buddha's decidedly ontic and unshakeable presence. Heng-Ching Shih takes a somewhat similar line to King's and argues: "The 'tathagatagarbha' symbolizes the potential for enlightenment (a principle) rather than a material "essence" of ultimate truth" and "the 'tathagatagarbha' is based on the framework of the 'Mahayana' doctrine of 'sunyata-pratityasamutpada [i.e. emptiness and conditionality]'. (Heng-Ching Shih, 1998, p. 10). The opposite of this is actually the case. The Buddha repeatedly makes it clear that the *ātman* or *tathāgata-garbha* is a real, uncreated, unconditioned, sovereign and unfabricated entity (*akṛta-dhātu*, says the Tibetans *Nirvāna Sūtra* in its "Tathāgatagarbha" chapter), the *svabhāva* (essence) of eternal Truth within each being, not merely a negatively construed 'emptiness' or a mere potential (although it of course enshrines that power too). The Buddha also on occasion speaks of his own *buddha-dhātu* (Yamamoto/Page, 1999, Vol. 6, p. 27) which he still retains. Obviously this cannot refer to any 'potential' of his to become a Buddha, since he already is one! In this passage he tells of what is not present, not existent, in the Buddha's Nature:

The *buddha-dhātu* of the Tathāgata has two aspects: one is existence and the second non-existence ... Regarding non-existence, this is the causal and resultant aspects of the Tathāgata's past wholesome, unwholesome and neutral karma, the *kleśhas* (mental negativities), the five skandhas, and the twelvefold interdependent arising.

It is evident from this that interdependent arising or conditionality is not a feature of this *buddha-dhātu*, despite what Heng-Ching Shi might claim. Nor can the *tathāgata-garbha* simply be dismissed as 'emptiness', since the Buddha excoriates those who view the *tathāgata-garbha* as emptiness, saying that they are like moths perishing in the flame of a lamp. He again and again (as we have seen) likens the *tathāgata-garbha* to an indestructible jewel or diamond within the body of the being—scarcely an appropriate image for a substanceless vacuity! After narrating the parable of the wrestler who falsely believes that he has 'lost' a precious diamond, when it is in reality firm, present and unharmed within his own body, the Buddha draws the moral:

Just as the wrestler had the idea—due to his impaired thinking—that he had lost the diamond, even though it was lodged in his body, similarly worldly beings do not comprehend the Reality of the Self (*ātma-tattva*); they fall under the sway of unwholesome friends and do not understand the [Tathāgata's] utterances with underlying meaning; they meditatively cultivate the notion that they lack the Self, even though there is the Self. (Hodge, 2006, p. 37).

Furthermore, the Buddha denounces as a cognitive distortion any perception of the non-Self as Self and equally the envisaging of the Self as non-Self: '...To regard the non-Self as the Self and to regard the Self as non-Self is perverse Dharma', he forcefully states (Yamamoto/Page, 1999, Vol. 1, p. 42). It is evident, from the perspective of this scripture, that the non-Self doctrine needs to be understood as bearing the underlying implication that there actually is a real Self (which is what the non-Self by definition is not) and that the various terms used for the Buddha Nature do not denote an absence of Self, but rather point to the indestructible nature of the Self which is to be found deep within all beings, indeed all Buddhas.

4) This revelation of the Buddha's on



the reality of a True Self is not presented by the Buddha in the form of reasoned debate, syllogisms, analysis, or argumentation; rather, it is presented as revelation. It is given as unvarnished, apodeictic fact—a fact which all beings (so we later learn in the sūtra) can only fully discern when they themselves become Buddhas.

5) The *tathāgata-dhātu* is utterly invulnerable to all attack, corruption and harm, and cannot be caused to expire. Indeed, it is the immanent life-principle (the *jīva*) itself.

6) It is inappropriate to meditate upon the immanent *tathāgata-dhātu* as though it were non-Self, just as it is equally inappropriate repeatedly to meditate upon it as though it were Emptiness—as though it were a vacuous nothingness and did not inherently exist. To regard the *garbha* in that fashion would be tantamount to committing painful spiritual suicide (that is what the image of the moth burning in the flame of the lamp connotes)—and the whole *raison-d'être* of Buddhism is to eradicate pain, not to arouse it.

7) Whatever the type of being concerned, the indwelling *tathāgata-dhātu* remains unassailed, unsullied, inviolate and deathless. It is utterly immortal—just as the Buddha himself, the *tathāgata-dhātu* made manifest, is never actually shown to die in any of the three major versions of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*. Outer narrative movement thus reflects and enacts inner metaphysical meaning.

8) The *tathāgata-dhātu* is not a destructive phenomenon. Rather, it functions as a nurturing, sustaining force within every sentient being and accompanies him or her up to and into Buddhahood itself.

But is all this to be understood as an ultimate teaching? Is all such talk of an eternal, immanent yet transcendent Self or *tathāgata-dhātu* not just a ruse or skilful tactic to attract people who might otherwise be put off by the Buddha's general teachings on non-Self and Emptiness? We have noted that this certainly does not ap-

ply to the major examples at which we have looked, but we need to consider how this sūtra views itself and how it wants its auditors and readers to see it. Is it provisional in its doctrines and requiring of corrective 'interpretation' (as the Gelukpa sect of Tibet, for example, would claim), or is it to be viewed as a direct, unmediated metaphysical revelation of eternal Truth?

On the specific question of the supramundane or nirvanic Self, it is apparent that the sūtra does assert an eternally abiding entity or dharma—what we might call the "Buddha-Self," since the Buddha utters the equation 'Self = Buddha'—as an ever-enduring reality of the highest order. That Buddha Self is one with Nirvāṇa. In the Dharmakṣema *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, the Buddha is asked by Mañjuśrī, "What is the meaning of this 'real truth' that you

Noble son, that which is endowed with the Eternal, Bliss, the Self and Purity is stated to be the meaning of the 'real truth'. —the Buddha

have mentioned?" The Buddha's reply is instructive and unequivocal:

Noble son, the real truth is the true Dharma. Noble son, if the Dharma is not true, then it cannot be called the 'real truth'. Noble son, the real truth is devoid of distortions ...the real truth is free from falsity. If it were not free from falsity, it would not be called the 'real truth'... Noble son, that which is endowed with the Eternal, Bliss, the Self and Purity is stated to be the meaning of the 'real truth'. (Yamamoto/Page, 2000, Vol. 4, "On Holy Actions," p. 48).

This definition of genuine Dharmic Truth is not only intrinsically clear and eloquent, but is given added weight by the fact that the answer is addressed to a question posed by none other than Mañjuśrī, the Bodhisattva of supreme Buddhist insight and understanding. In this connection, we might also interestingly note that the teachings of this entire sūtra (in its

Tibetan form) are significantly entrusted precisely to Mañjuśrī at the very end of the scripture, which can be taken as a symbolic sign of the sūtra's high significance.

On the broader question of whether the sūtra as a whole wishes to be seen as high-level teaching or as a concessionary adaptation of Dharma for those of more rudimentary spiritual grasp, we should note the fact that the opening of the Tibetan version tells of how the Buddha will herein give the "final explanation" of his Dharma, and will do so in "... words which expressed his meaning with exhaustive thoroughness." (Hodge, 2006, p. 1). The Buddha himself later tells a female follower of how on the day of his Parinirvāṇa, he will give the essential meaning of all his secret Dharma. He says:

... when I am making preparations to pass into Parinirvāṇa, I shall then speak of the Tathāgata's various secret words of implicational mean-

ing in their entirety to the śrāvakas [disciples]. On that day, I shall impart the intended gist to my sons. [Hodge, 2006, Chapter 8, "The Four Methods of Teaching," p.60].

That day has, of course, now come. We should note that, contrary to the implications of some scholars, such as Williams (1989, p.100), the Buddha overwhelmingly does not direct these teachings at those (such as non-Buddhist ascetics) who desperately want to believe in a Self—but to those who are well-versed in and familiar with his non-Self teachings (i.e. his monks and great bodhisattvas). Thus these teachings go beyond "non-Self" and are transmitted as the Buddha's final, definitive illumination of the entire corpus of his doctrines.

The colophon of the Tibetan text clearly indicates the centrality of these final teachings when it declares that the sūtra constitutes "... the essence of all scriptures of the authentic Dharma" (Hodge, 2006, p. 161) and moreover is equal to an *uttara-*



tantra—that is to say, to the final empowering information and instructions at the end of a medical treatise, which enable the doctor to make his mantras and remedies truly efficacious.

The reference to an *uttara-tantra* is not confined to the colophon. The Buddha himself has recourse to this image on several occasions, not least in intensified form when telling of the supremacy of this sūtra's teachings. In Chapter 14, "The Letters," he affirms (Tibetan version):

... the very ultimate (*uttarottara*) of the meaning of all sūtras is taught by this sūtra. Not one single syllable or tittle has been taught [herein] that has previously been heard by any *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha*. This sūtra is supremely excellent [*varottama*]. For example, just as the people of Uttarakuru in the north are virtuous, likewise those who have listened to this great sūtra have become supramundane—you should know that they are Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas [great Bodhisattvas]. Therefore, this signifies that [this sūtra] is a great *uttara-tantra*. (Hodge, 2006, p. 124)

Finally in this section, we might usefully look at what Chapter 7, "The Name and Virtues of the Sūtra" (Tibetan version) says on the relative merit of this scripture when measured against all other enunciations of Dharma and the meditations with which they are linked. The Buddha states:

... for example, the various sciences such as medicine and the three sciences are gathered up in their respective *uttara-tantras*; similarly, all the various secret Dharma-gates, the words of implicit intention [*sandhā-vacana*] uttered by the Tathagatas are gathered up in this *Mahāparinirvāna*[-Sūtra]. ... This *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* is stated to be the best, the most excellent, the foremost of all ... *samādhis* in those sūtras ... the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* is stated to be the best, the most excellent, the foremost of all sūtras." (Hodge, 2006, p. 57)

While scholars such as Sallie B. King and Heng Ching Shih try, on embarrassingly flimsy evidential grounds, to re-interpret and re-configure the essentialist teachings of this sūtra into the opposite of what they repeatedly state, some notable Buddhist masters have understood such doctrines in their simple and straightforward form and sought to communicate that understanding. One such prominent individual was the 14th-century Tibetan Dharma master, Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen.

3. Dolpopa

The mediaeval Tibetan scholar-monk, Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen, popularly styled "the Buddha of Dolpo," insists that the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* and other *tathāgata-garbha* (Buddha Nature) texts should be taken at their word as definitive and cataphatic revelations, not as documents requiring modifying 'interpretation'.

Dolpopa seeks to present what the Buddha actually says accurately and fairly, and states that according to the sutras (such as the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, and the *Angulimāliya Sūtra*.) there truly does exist a spiritual essence within all persons and things—the quintessence of Buddhahood—which is unshakeable, timeless and deathless. Dolpopa rejects what he sees as the pernicious views of those who would palm off Buddhahood as a nonexistent, or manufactured, causatively engendered or composite phenomenon. Dolpopa in The Fourth Council declares:

I cannot defer to those who accept that in reality there is no buddhahood, who do not accept a noncomposite Buddhahood, and who do not accept a permanent, stable, and eternal Buddhahood, and so I join my palms together and offer an appeal. Please look at those statements in the Kṛtayuga [Dharma] which say that absolute truth, indivisible space and intrinsic awareness is the primal Buddha, the ground buddhahood, permanent, stable, eternal, everlasting,

all pervasive thusness [essence of reality], and the enlightenment of the Buddha. (Stearns, 1999, p. 165).

Dolpopa frequently uses the term 'Self' or analogous phrases to refer to this Ultimate Reality abiding in all beings. He also quotes numerous sutras and tantras in support of his doctrinal stance. Thus, he quotes from the *Great Seal Drop Tantra* on the genuine reality of the Self or spiritual essence, when he states: 'A self pervading all things does indeed exist. If self did not exist, then all transmigrators would be like a tree whose roots are cut.' (Hopkins, 2006, p. 133) Clearly, the Self envisaged here is the very 'root' of all beings—the supplier and sustainer of life itself.

Dolpopa further enumerates 'Self'-phrases when he speaks of Ultimate Reality in the Buddhist scripture, The Expression of *Manjushri's Ultimate Names* (*Mañjuśrī-nāma-saṅgīti*). Here are some of the coinages encountered in this context, giving expression to a truly real and lordly 'Over-Self' (a term, incidentally, later widely used and promulgated by the English mystic, Paul Brunton):

Buddha-I or Self; Beginningless self; Non-proliferative self; Self of thusness; Self of primordial purity; Supreme omnipresence; Singular self; Solid and hard self; Diamond self; Lord of space; Supreme self of all creatures; Holy immovable self; Holy very clear self, holding the full Buddha enlightenment (Hopkins, 2006, pp. 279-294).

The reader at this juncture might reasonably ask: 'Just what is this Buddha-Self? What is the Buddha's nature?' Dolpopa responds:

Buddha—an essence of immeasurable, incomprehensible, unfathomable, excellent exalted body, wisdom, qualities, and activities extremely wondrous and fantastic—is vast like space and the holy source giving rise to all that is wished by sentient beings like a wish-granting jewel (Hopkins, 2006, p. 424).



We note the reference to ‘body’. The Buddha is not ‘unsubstantial’, not without a body. He has in fact an ‘excellent exalted body’. Indeed, in developed Mahāyāna theory, he possesses three bodies (the *trikāya* doctrine)! In fact, the whole of the Buddhist quest for Nirvana could be construed as a quest for a deathless, eternal Body-and-Soul (known as the *dharma-kāya*). So any claim that the Buddha (who represents perfected being) is substanceless and a literal ‘non-entity’ needs to be modified in the light of this teaching.

When we come to present-day Buddhist masters, such as the Thai forest monk, Maha Boowa, we find an even more streamlined definition of what the ultimate or core essence of beings is. It is inner Dharma—the immortal ‘heart’ (*citta*).

4. Maha Boowa

Maha Boowa was a famed 20th-century Thai Buddhist meditation master (physically deceased in 2011) belonging to the Forest Monk tradition of Thai Theravada Buddhism. His teachings are notable for being more affirmative of a positive, enduring Reality than is often found in Theravada Buddhism. He calls this deathless essence in all people and creatures the indwelling Dhamma (Truth) or *citta*—the heart or mind. Reminiscent of *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine, Maha Boowa tells of how this heart is led astray by *kilesas* (mental pollutants), and of how we thus fail to be what we in fact are—our ‘true self’. Maha Boowa comments:

Our real problem, our one fundamental problem—which is also the *citta*’s fundamental problem—is that we lack the power needed to be our own true self. Instead, we have always taken counterfeit things to be the essence of who we really are, so that the *citta*’s behavior is never in harmony with its true nature. (Maha Boowa, 2005 <http://www.forestdhamma-books.com/book/3/Arahattamagga.pdf>)

True Self? True nature? This has a decidedly essentialist ring to it—anathema to most Buddhists. Yet Maha Boowa is here standing in a long Buddhist tradition stretching back to the ‘luminous / shining mind’ of the Pali Canon, extending through the *Nirvāna Sūtra* and the *tathāgata-garbha sūtras*, through to Dolpopa and beyond. This species of Buddhism does not shy away from a recognition of a deathless, immutable core reality—the Self or Essence—within all beings, which is one with Dharma—ultimate Truth—and one with the Buddha. Maha Boowa tells of how this *citta* is ultimately free from the domain of the impermanent, the painful, and the non-Self. It is utterly indissoluble, independent, free and Knowing—just as the Buddha declared of the Buddha-Self in the *Mahā-parinirvāna Sūtra*. Maha Boowa states of the *citta*:

Although all conditioned phenomena without exception are governed by the three universal laws of *anicca* [impermanence], *dukkha* [suffering], and *anattā* [non-Self], the *citta*’s true nature is not subject to these laws ... the true power of the *citta*’s own nature is that it knows and does not die. This deathlessness is a quality that lies beyond disintegration. Being beyond disintegration, it also lies beyond the range of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* and the universal laws of nature ... (Maha Boowa, <http://www.forestdhamma-books.com/book/3/Arahattamagga.pdf>)

Maha Boowa draws a distinction (as do the *tathāgata-garbha sūtras*) between the physical body and its attendant elements and the *citta* or *manodhātu* (the mental sphere). The body knows nothing, but the *citta* Knows. Interestingly, the *Mahāyāna Angulimaliya Sūtra* declares that the pure *manas* (mind) is the *tathāgata-garbha*. Maha Boowa clearly brings out the difference between transitory body and knowing, deathless Mind when he comments:

The body is physical matter—how can it be likened to the *citta*? The *citta* is a mental phenomenon, an awareness that knows.... earth, water, wind and fire elements know nothing; only the mental element—the *manodhātu*—knows. This

being the case, how can the *citta*’s essential knowing nature and the body’s physical elements possibly be equated. They are obviously separate realities. (Maha Boowa, <http://www.forestdhamma-books.com/book/3/Arahattamagga.pdf>)

Maha Boowa calls this essential, indwelling and indestructible Awareness—distinct from our physical being—“the knowing presence.” (Maha Boowa, 2005, p. 17). This is reminiscent of the Buddha’s words in the *Nirvāna Sūtra*, where he states: ‘the constant presence of the Tathāgata [Buddha] is the Self’.

5. Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing declarations by the Buddha in the *Nirvāna Sūtra*, buttressed, as it were, by statements from Dolpopa and Maha Boowa, we might sensibly modify our understanding of a certain stream of Buddhist teaching, and note that it does allow for the reality of a true and enduring essence or Self. While all that is impermanent, painful and conditioned falls under the rubric of the non-Self (the sphere of the worldly *skandhas*), that which lies beyond the *skandhas*, beyond suffering and impermanence can (at least within this particular tradition of Buddhist discourse) be termed the essence of the being or the True Self.

From the perspective of such a Buddhist vision, universally and absolutely to apply the formula of emptiness and non-Self—even to the sphere of the *tathāgata-garbha*—may be deemed dangerously misguided. As the Buddha in the *Nirvāna Sūtra* warns: ‘By having cultivated the absence of self (*anātman*) in connection with the *tathāgata-garbha* and having continually cultivated Emptiness, suffering will not be eradicated—but one will become like a moth in the flame of a lamp.’ (Hodge 2006, p. 107).

It must remain for us a highly disquieting thought that many Buddhists today, who are taught to regard even the Buddha and Nirvana, as well as the Buddha Essence, as empty of any immutable, eternal Reality, may be courting such spiritual disaster as the Buddha here warns against.



In view of these dangers, promulgating the spiritually positive and affirmative teachings of the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* and the dharmic vision of Dolpopa and Maha Boowa becomes for the Mahayana Buddhist not just a duty, but an urgent need.

References

Boowa, M. (2005). *Arahattamagga, Arahattaphala: the Path to Arahantship – A Compilation of Venerable Acariya Maha Boowa's Dhamma Talks about His Path of Practice*, translated by Bhikkhu Silaratano, <http://www.forestdhammabooks.com/book/3/Arahattamagga.pdf>, retrieved 12 April 2009.

Habata, H. (2007). *Die Zentralasiatischen Sanskrit-Fragmente des Mahāparinirvāna-Mahāsūtra*, Marburg: Indica et Tibetica Verlag.

Hodge, S. (2005). *The Tathāgata-garbha Chapter in Faxian's Nirvāna Sūtra*. London: unpublished MS.

Hodge, S. (2006). *The Tibetan Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra: An English Translation*. London: unpublished MS.

Hopkins, J. (2006). *Mountain Doctrine: Tibet's Fundamental Treatise on Other-Emptiness and the Buddha Matrix*. New York: Snow Lion Publications.

King, S. B. (1997) 'Buddha Nature is Impeccably Buddhist', in *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism*, ed. by Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.

Stearns, C. (1999) *The Buddha from Dolpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Shih, Heng-Ching (1998), 'The Significance of Tathāgata-garbha: A Positive Expression of Sunyata', <http://www.vietnet/~anson/ebud/ebdha191.htm> retrieved 12 April 2009.

Williams, P. (1989). *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, London: Routledge. Internet.

Yamamoto, K. (tr), Page, Dr. Tony (ed) (1999-2000). *The Mahayana Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, London: Nirvana Publications.

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

by John Robert Cornell

Continued from the last issue...

4. New Voices of the Land

*While I stood there I saw more than I
could tell,
and I understand more than I saw;
for I was seeing in a sacred manner
the shapes of all things in the
spirit,
and the shape of all shapes as they
must live together like one being.¹*

An Ongoing Conversation

The land is talking to us with new voices.

Each place that we visited on our trip has a bookstore nearby different from anything I have seen in the city. They display these new voices of the land in a clarity of word and a majesty of image rare in a world of commercial and technological focus. The tabloids are gone or hidden in a corner. No soaps, no *Cosmopolitan*, no *New York Times* best sellers. Although they have souvenirs and light entertainment, these bookstores don't try to spin up our emotions or distract us. Their focus has shifted 90 degrees. They are looking out of the corner of our collective national eye. There they have seen something and have calmed down. The new voices on their shelves reflect the clarity of the air and a quiet appreciation of the non-human world outside their windows. We saw it over and over—a seriousness, beauty, and deep but unpretentious reflection in the art and in the titles and covers of their books and magazines: *Landscapes of the Sacred*, *The Greening of Faith*, *Pieces of White Shell*, *Cathedrals of the Spirit*, *Dialogs with the Living Earth*, *Practice of the Wild*, *News of the Universe*, *John of the Mountains*.

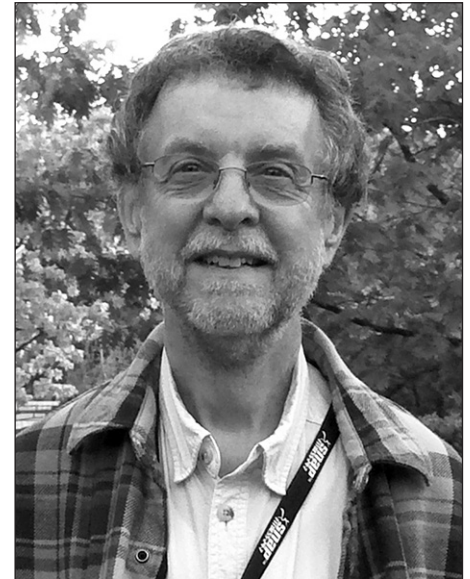


Photo courtesy John Robert Cornell.

We picked some works of three authors in a bookstore near Zion—Tony Hillerman, Barry Lopez, and Ann Zwingner. These very different writers are among the land's new voices.

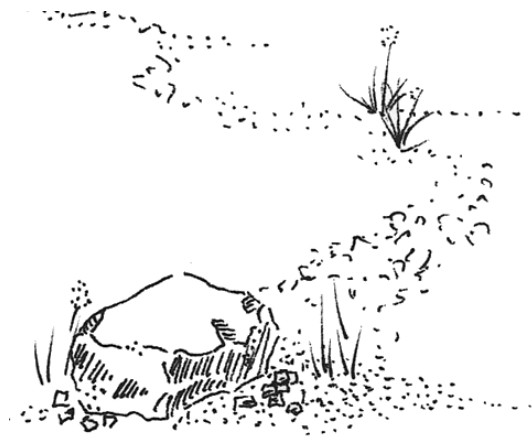
As we prowled the badlands and hidden canyons of southern Utah and north-eastern Arizona, Hillerman's taut, suspenseful mystery novels served as a bridge from Anglo to Navajo sight. Open one of these books and you slip behind the eyes of modern Navajos balancing between witchcraft and forensic science, ballistic missiles and ceremonial sings, pickup trucks and talking animals. Besides telling an absorbing story, Hillerman takes you to the brink of the old ways without enforcing a world view. He leaves the mystery in things even after his tribal police heroes solve the mystery of the novel. His characters maintain their cultural viewpoints and so we get to see how "the facts" magically change, viewed from radically different angles.

Reading his books on the Navajo reservation, we noticed habits and expectations. Pointing at someone with your finger can be insulting here. Interrupting another person before he finishes speaking is a far worse breach of manners to the Navajo than to us. The traditional stories and practices that carry the meanings of Diné culture encourage harmony with all things instead of competition. They dis-



count the importance of accumulating wealth. Hillerman often highlights clashes between these values and those of modern Western culture in the solution to his mysteries.

By contrast, Ann Zwinger writes classic natural history. From her home on the eastern edge of the Rockies she finds herself drawn back to this southwestern desert and canyon country over and over. I read *Wind in the Rock*² as we meandered through the canyonlands of southeastern Utah. Her clear, active prose turned the tadpoles and lonely cliffs and goldenweed of that area into nature's arms and legs and thoughts—alive, intricate, worthy of study in themselves. A love of the land flows like a vein of gold through her meticulous research into the history, archeology, botany, and geology of the area. Our hikes through canyon country took on an educated depth because of her efforts. With her we could time-travel back 300 years on a five mile trail. The inscrutable hieroglyphics of the Coconino sandstone grew more legible. Flat facts of canyon walls and cliff ruins became doorways to early Mormon scouts and earlier Anasazi farmers. We felt less like aliens in this strange land of bare sand and slickrock.



Illustrations by Karen Cornell

As for the third writer, I didn't sense the depth of Barry Lopez's attention to the land till we got back home and found his book, *Arctic Dreams*, on our living room bookshelf. But I did find a saying in the Taos library that predicted it. A writer,



said Lopez, must cultivate a sense of himself or herself as one who does not know. Out of that humility and attentive listening, he meant, the writer would discover what story was asking to be told. Many of the new voices of the land instinctively follow Lopez's advice. Only after listening intently to the land does one become its authentic emissary.

Instructed by these and other voices, gradually I came to appreciate how much our trip through the Southwest was part of an adventure larger than our personal lives or aspirations. That this was not so much a two-month search as a small syllable in an ongoing conversation between the human species and the rest of nature. People have been thinking about and acting out the kinship between ourselves and the land for a long time, with compelling consequences; and a body of distinctive writings on this subject has been growing in the West for generations.

Poet Robert Bly gathered threads of this discussion in a collection of poetry and stitched them together with his commentary in *News of the Universe*, from Sierra Club Books. My copy is worn and warped. Its cover still clings with scotch tape. Its wrinkled pages have survived floods and moves, yet they still

pulse with life. They intrigued my daughter when she, eight years old, sat on my lap and we eavesdropped on a conversation stretching across centuries and oceans. And here is the interesting thing: In this conversation one hears not only the voices of humans, but also of the stone and the river and the wild black night "awake to the anthems of the stars."³

Stone

*Go inside a stone.
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger's tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.
From the outside the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full
weight,
Even though a child throws it in a
river;
The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed
To the river bottom
Where the fishes come to knock on it
And listen.*

*I have seen sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed,
So perhaps it is not dark inside after
all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind
a hill—
Just enough light to make out
The strange writings, the star-charts
On the inner walls.⁴*

There is a crossing in these poems. They take us from where we start, encased in the human cocoon and blind to the deer trail out back, oblivious to the Milky Way overhead. The words gather the wandering threads of our attention into a beam and the pace picks up. Suddenly we are thrown through a veil and find ourselves looking at the strange star-charts on another side of reality.

Here is another example, this time from Kenneth Rexroth.



The Heart of Herakles

*Lying under the stars,
In the summer night,
Late, while the autumn
Constellations climb the sky,
As the Cluster of Hercules
Falls down the west
I put the telescope by
And watch Deneb
Move towards the zenith.
My body is asleep. Only
My eyes and brain are awake.
The stars stand around me
Like gold eyes. I can no longer
Tell where I begin and leave off.
The faint breeze in the dark pines,
And the invisible grass,
The tipping earth, the swarming stars
Have an eye that sees itself.⁵*



Riding on the poet's words we again slip magically to the other side. Boundaries fall away. The invisible grass and the dark pines are awake and aware. Everything is conscious and we are an intimate part of that everything.

But we don't manage to stay there. Soon, almost instantly, we boomerang back into the purely human world, unable to see or hear anything else.

Cosmologist Thomas Berry calls this loss of contact spiritual autism: "People being so locked up in themselves that no one and nothing else can get in.... That is what has happened to the human community in our times. We are talking only to ourselves. We are not talking to the rivers, we are not listening to the wind and stars. We have broken the great conversation."⁶

Spiritual Autism

Bly traced this sickness back to Descartes' axiom, the bedrock of modern civilization: *Cogito ergo sum*. I think. Therefore I am. This famous phrase, coined on November 10, 1619, echoed forward into the 18th and 19th centuries, foreshadowing the triumphal march of Reason, its coronation in the Age of Enlightenment, and its application to daily life in the Industrial Revolution. Today it lives on in the reign of science and technology. The thinking creature surges to the front of existence. More than that, to exclusive existence, to exclusive significance.

I think.

That leaves out Thunderbird Butte and the frogs at North Creek and the northern spotted owl. It leaves out the bald eagle, the blue whale, the giant redwood, and the red lichen on the boulder. It excludes all of non-human nature. All sacred places. All beings, visible or invisible, that do not possess human reason or are not accessible to it.

Reason then awards to itself the role of supreme arbiter of reality: *Therefore I am*.

In a stunning reversal, existence has become dependent on reason! And therefore everything that does not think

is not. Nature, and the power that the ancients recognized in its sacred groves and springs, its kinship with humanity in the beginning times, its innate intelligence and order, become peripheral, expendable. In fact, they become simply commodity, humbled subjects of almighty reason.⁷

In fact, they go underground, out of sight, invisible. A forest becomes nothing in itself, voiceless, without rights or power. It becomes "resources," a bureaucratic word, a subordinating word. A forest *is*, *only*, in the eyes of the (human) beholder: an obstacle to be cleared by the farmer or developer, a crop for the lumber mill, a composition for the painter, an obstruction for the road builder, a resource to be managed for human recreation and productivity by the national forest supervisor.



This is how far this view has come: When an Indian leader asks on a Public Radio talk show who will represent the eagles at the United Nations, the program's experts chuckle. The question has to be a joke. We don't understand what else it could mean. It has no home in our meaning world, no place in our institutions. It is so alien to our way of life that it does not merit a reply.

Bly noted that this impoverishment of the world of significance, this betrayal of nature, this collapse of consciousness down to the single note of human reason, exiled more than non-human nature. The champion of this single, solar consciousness was European and male.

So out with the deep dark forest went the "savage" non-European peoples of the earth. English poet Alexander Pope captured the sentiment of the time when he ridiculed the unenlightened beliefs of the old ways.

*Lo, the poor Indian whose untutor'd
mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in
the wind..⁸*

Out also went the emotional, non-rational, lunar, non-male half of what remained. In "Paradise Lost," John Milton voiced a common attitude toward women. He chided God, who had wisely "peopled highest Heaven with Spirits masculine," for foolishly providing "this fair defect of Nature" to generate mankind. Much more sensible would He have been to fill "the World at once with men as Angels, without feminine."⁹

Finally, out went what was hidden with-



in and beyond nature. "When we deny there is consciousness in nature," observed Bly, "we also deny consciousness to the worlds we find by going through nature; and we end with only one world, the world of MacDonald's, and that one is exploitable."¹⁰

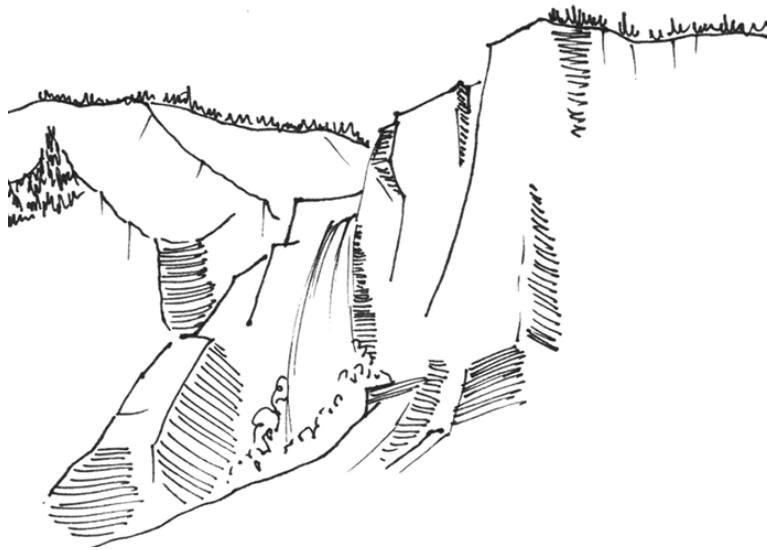
The way was open, both practically and theoretically, for the European powers to carve up the rest of the world into colonial enclaves. It was open for the Salem witch trials, for the slaughter of the buffalo on the American plains, for the wide scale slavery of the African blacks and the South American Indians.

It was also open for the invention of the electric light bulb and the internal combustion engine, the mechanization of agriculture, the development of modern medicine and sanitation, the evolution of secular democratic government and public education, the launch of the Hubble Space Telescope and the Internet. One can hardly imagine the modern world without *Cogito, ergo sum*.

The unprecedented and unrestricted application of reason to the natural world via science supplied the means. The philosophy of the enlightenment supplied the justification.

This shift in Western consciousness has become our common assumption and has spread rapidly around the world. There is hardly any place on the planet today untouched by it.

Even so, it does not rule unchallenged. Bly tells of the first voices to revolt against the new King. He traced the beginnings of the movement to a few poets in the nineteenth century: Englishman William Blake, Germans Goethe and Hölderlin, and Gérard de Nerval of France. Blake, for example, in defiance of this new monism of consciousness, demanded multiple "vision" and warned against the "sleep" of Sir Isaac Newton's scientific reason.



*Have you been to the Mountain? Its stairs in cloud.
Hoofs of a mule pick their way through the fog.
Unconscious dragons breathe inside tunnels.
Granite splits, masses of water pour down.
Have you been there? That is where
the path we take goes! Oh my Father, it is time to go!*¹⁴

These poets, said Bly, announced the return of the nighttime, magical, mysterious consciousness imaged so well by the an-

cient world,¹⁵ a re-peopling of the landscape, a new respect for the world of animals and plants, a new journey into the underworld of reason, the unconscious.

We can see the results as this revolt gradually picked up steam. Many nations of the world threw off their colonial masters in the twentieth century. Psychology came into being as a science to study realms of the psyche beyond reason. Women won the vote and battled for equal treatment in business and politics and education. The civil rights movement gained momentum and legal underpinnings. Some people in the sixties and seventies discovered the presence living in the stone and the intelligence in the tree under the influence of psychedelic drugs. The environmental movement became a national force in the early 1970s. Indian children are no longer forcibly removed from their families and forbidden to speak their native language in boarding schools.

Nonetheless, science and technology—which is to say, (human) reason—are still the gods of our faith. They set the boundaries of our politics. They rule at the university, despite its name. We turn to them in time of danger. Our doctors believe almost exclusively in their blessings. Our armies rely on them for war. Our recreation and our agriculture are laced with them. Our cars and phones and bank accounts and houses all stand on their

*Now I a fourfold vision see,
And a fourfold vision is given to me;
'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
And threefold in soft Beulah's night
And twofold always. May God us keep
From Single vision and Newton's sleep!*¹¹

Nerval and Hölderlin blasted the arrogance and hypocrisy of the rationalists.

*Free thinker! Do you think you are the
only thinker
on this earth in which life blazes
inside all things?
Your liberty does what it wishes with
the powers it controls,
but when you gather to plan, the
universe is not there.*¹²

*I'm sick of you hypocrites babbling
about gods!
Rationality is what you have, you
don't believe
In Helios, nor the sea being, nor the
thunder being;
And the earth is a corpse, so why
thank her?*¹³

We are not surprised to find out that Goethe was an accomplished naturalist. He found inspiration in mountain, cloud, and tree for his forays into the mysterious world these rebels were trying to reopen to the European mind.



foundation. The eagles have yet no representation at the United Nations.

And the sacred dimension, left behind in the old beliefs, remains homeless, mystic a synonym for lunatic, the sacred a concept to pay lip service to but not the ruling or inspirational impulse of life.

Barry Lopez sharpens the contrast between the two sets of beliefs.

The conventional wisdom of our time is that European man has advanced by enormous strides since the age of cathedrals. He has landed on the moon. He has cured smallpox. He has harnessed the power in the atom. Another argument, however, might be made in the opposite direction, that all European man has accomplished in 900 years is a more complicated manipulation of materials, a more astounding display of his grasp of the physical principles of matter. That ours is not an age of mystics but of singular adepts, of performers. That the erection of the cathedrals was the last wild stride European man made before falling back into the confines of his intellect.¹⁶

It is from this “other argument,” this gathering minority view that the new voices of the land come, many of them, however, armed with the tools of science itself and of the intellect.

What the New Voices Say

In this country we can trace their intellectual and literary ancestry back to Henry David Thoreau, to Emerson and Whitman, to John Muir and Mary Austin, to Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson. Many of them are poets—Mary Oliver, Denise Levertov, Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, William Everson. Many of them come out of the natural sciences: Richard Nelson, Terry Tempest Williams, Loren Eisley. Some of them are primarily writers and artists, but their art draws upon the land and into the land: Frank Waters, Ann Zwinger, Ansel Adams, Barry Lopez, Annie Dillard, John McPhee, Peter Matthiessen.¹⁷

Let’s listen for a while to these voices.

Poet Gary Snyder tells about a traditional south Indian dance he attended in the city of Jaipur. The dancer, Padma Bhushan Shrimati Balasaraswati, was portraying a familiar scene as the foster mother of the baby Krishna, a beloved Indian deity known for his mischievous ways. In the story, the mother notices a bit of dirt that the divine child is teething on. When she looks into his mouth to remove it, she is stunned to find herself staring into the starry expanse of the whole universe. The infant has surprised her with a revelation of his larger identity.

Snyder’s hair stood on end when Bala danced this scene. His body told him something momentous had happened. He was intrigued. He speculated about it but could not put his finger on it. A few days later he had a chance to ask her about it after a private performance.

“When you move in your dance to the point where you look into Krishna’s mouth, are you already visualizing stars?” She laughed sardonically and said: “Of course not. I must start with dirt. It must become stars. Sometimes all I see is dirt, and the dance fails. That night it was stars.”¹⁸

Snyder’s question captures the rationalism of modern culture: Are you visualizing stars before you get to this crucial scene? To paraphrase, how are you making this up?

In two sentences—nine words—Bala slices through the single vision to a new world and identifies the method.

It must *become* stars—a revelation, a new becoming, a direct participation in another dimension. The speck of dirt itself must reveal the starry universe. Only then does the hair stand on end, the body viscerally recognize the presence of the sacred. We can see, switching for a moment to a different medium, a kinship to another icon of sacred vision, Michelangelo’s painting of creation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Electric connec-

tion across the divide between the mortal world of clay and the Creator. A breaking through to the other side, the tyranny of single vision overthrown. Without that breakthrough, “all I see is dirt, and the dance fails.”

But *I must start with dirt*. The method to reach the breakthrough is that simply stated, though it may require the wholehearted, full time dedication of an artist or a dancer.

Or a writer, for the new voices of the land tell us the same thing. They start with dirt. They start with the particular,



the mundane—the dandelion, the sparrow, the pebble in the driveway. And for it to become stars requires a severe discipline—their full attention.

This is an uncommon effort, a meditative practice. Naturalist Joseph Wood Krutch remarked on its difficulty:

It is not easy to live in that continuous awareness of things which alone is true living... the faculty of wonder tires easily.... Really to see something once or twice a week is almost inevitably to have to try... to make oneself a poet.¹⁹

And what of the rest of us, those not inclined to make the effort of continuous awareness or bear the burden of the poet? Gary Snyder has this answer:

There are tens of millions of people in North America who were physically born here but who are not actually living here intellectually, imaginatively, or morally.²⁰



Not living here?

Then where are we living? Maybe nowhere. In our ideas and plans and habits, in the (human-only) news, in the invisible waves of our feelings, in our family dramas, in the fairyland of television and radio. In our human cocoon. Everywhere but here, on this land, in the American dirt. Some of our children think that cantaloupe come from supermarkets. We have lost the great conversation. We live off the land but not on it.

As a result it is nearly impossible for us to grok how different our experience of the hillside or the poppy is from that of a people radically tuned to their physical environment. Luther Standing Bear tells us how the Lakota people were drawn to the sheer touch of the earth, an attraction that grew stronger with old age.

The old people came literally to love the soil and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power. It was good for the skin to touch the earth and the old people like to remove their moccasins and walk with bare feet on the sacred earth.²¹

Philosopher David Abram studies the difference between a Westerner's perception of the land and that of people whose immediate survival depends on it, peoples like the Aborigines of Australia, the Inuit of the far North, and the Amahuaca Indians of the Amazon jungle.

The Amahuaca do not need to be poets to pay attention. They are a hunter-gatherer people. Their next meal, their protection from the afternoon storm, their health, their personal belongings, their children's safety all depend on moment-by-moment awareness of their physical surroundings. Aboriginal peoples like the Amahuaca, while spread throughout the world and culturally diverse, consistently affirm an insight baffling to the Western mind: that the nonhuman inhabitants of their territory are not only aware and intelligent, but that "nature itself is articulate; it speaks."²²

Many of the new voices of the land turn to these peoples for instruction in this intimate attunement to the natural world. Barry Lopez, for example, has spent time traveling and hunting with the Inuit people of the Far North. Contrast what he has learned about hunting with a guns-and-beer weekend in the woods with your neighbor during deer season.



Hunting in my experience—and by hunting I simply mean being out on the land—is a state of mind. All of one's faculties are brought to bear in an effort to become fully incorporated into the landscape.... To hunt means to have the land around you like clothing. To engage in a wordless dialogue with it, one so absorbing that you cease to talk with your human companions.²³

To have the land around you like clothing is starting with the dirt. To bring all one's faculties to the effort to become fully incorporated into the landscape—there is the discipline.

My first experience of this kind of aboriginal teaching came from Stan Paddilla at the beginning of a sweat that he led for a small group of men more than a decade ago. Stan is an artist and a teacher. He is also Yaqui, a Native American tribe from northwestern Mexico. Many Native American cultures of the West practice a variation of the sweat lodge, a purification ceremony in a confined space heated with hot rocks and steam. We were awaiting the start of the sweat in a small foothill valley with a spring-fed pond.

Talking in a quiet, conversational tone, Stan drew our attention to the pine trees on the hillside by the pond, the flicker that had stopped hammering on them when we arrived, the little rise topped with small granite boulders behind the pond, the alders along the creek below the dam. We gradually became more aware of the native inhabitants of the valley, more present. Stan then mentioned casually that they were also paying attention to us. He reminded us that we were visitors—strangers really—in their home and that they were quite aware of our arrival. He talked softly, slowly, with many pauses. After a little while a bullfrog spoke up, and then a raven croaked in the oak on our side of the pond. A small breeze rustled the grass near the water's edge. The timing of each of these sounds and movements eerily and appropriately punctuated what Stan was saying. He incorporated them into his words as naturally as if human members of the group had offered their comments. It seemed as if they were having a conversation with him that we were listening in on.

Soon I noticed my awareness escaping its habitual confinement in my thought-world. It came out of my body into the surrounding air and onto the grass. It spread or deepened. Some invisible confining barrier dissolved, so that the pool of awareness contained more than before. It grew to include the pond. Then the hillside was inside it, and the tops of the trees from which the flicker was watching. I seemed to feel the frog and raven and pine aware of us, interacting with us, equal but



different members of the same seeing. But the “I” was fading as the barriers between us dissolved. The awareness somehow ceased to be my awareness. It was *an* awareness, impersonal, distributed, inclusive, awake, self-knowing. We all shared in its seeing. It was no longer locked in the human subject or in the boundaries of reason’s judgments. Stan’s words were no longer strange and interesting ideas, but simple statement of experience.

We had started with the dirt. A sustained, guided attention to it relocated us into that larger seeing. Only then were we ready to enter the sweat lodge and begin the purification.

Anthropologist Richard Nelson spent years with the Koyukon people of Alaska. He described a similar inclusive seeing after watching a young bald eagle perched on a limb on a wild Pacific northwest island. He climbed the tree, approaching the bird. They stared at each other.

*There is the eagle’s world, and there is mine, sealed beyond reach within our selves. But despite these insuperable differences, we are also one, caught in the same fixed gaze that contains us.*²⁴

The new voices of the land report two different types of response, opposite sides of the same coin, to this close attention to the particular. First, they describe a devastating sense of loss and grief at the destruction of so much of the natural world by industrial civilization and its consequences. Out of this experience some of them, like modern day Jeremiahs, level a fierce and comprehensive critique at our way of life. The critique is comprehensive because it addresses abuses of not only the human poor and disadvantaged but the whole natural world. They warn that our path of spiritual autism and exploitation of nature is unsustainable and contains the seeds of its own ruin.

Many of the same voices also describe a second response: a powerful and healing joy from this direct, prolonged meeting with the land. It is a source of beauty, of refreshment, an antidote for the fragmentation and alienation of modern life. This response sometimes leads to peak mo-

ments and turning points of their life and even to a mystical loss of boundaries and a merging in a larger grandeur.

Both these responses—call them the prophetic response and the mystical response—are characteristic of humanity’s great spiritual teachers.

The warnings may be more familiar to us because of sensationalizing coverage by the popular media; but the new prophetic voices of the land offer a more sober, in depth, long range view of our predicament than the media usually present. They expose the hidden costs and consequences of business as usual. They bring to the forefront worries that niggle at us around the edges. They challenge our assumptions about the good life: that our version of the American dream can continue indefinitely on its present course; that technology will always provide a solution to our inconvenience; that what we consider the good life may result in an impoverishment or destruction of the rain forests of Brazil, the desert pupfish, or the coral reefs near Key West, but not really of us. They promote a widened vision of who is us.

Anthropologist Richard Nelson grieved for whole islands, clearcut in order to extract their natural resources.

*There is great risk in loving a wild place, knowing it can so easily be swept away. It seems little different from loving a person—the profound and tender pleasures, mingled with a fear of loss. Not far from here I’ve seen entire islands subjugated and hollowed out, left with shattered remnants of the life they once held. There is such sadness in these places, even for one who never saw them whole. The silence of their ruined landscapes is like the weeping of the dead.*²⁵

He watched the salmon boats take thousands of pounds of “product” with mechanized efficiency on a bay near his home.

Each time the pump is switched on, a solid mass of fish runs through the screened conduit, and scarlet water spews out onto the bay. The boat rides

*on a crimson smear, foaming with bloody suds. Over the din of roaring engines, the Pomarine’s captain bellows, “Is that all the goddamn faster that pump can go?”*²⁶

Contrast that with the approach of Nelson’s Indian teachers to the same harvest.

*I think of the Koyukon people, drawing each salmon from the net, cutting it on a rough-hewn table beside the river, drying or cooking it for themselves or their dogs, teaching their children to speak respectfully of fish and to measure their take according to need, engaging themselves in a process that recognizes the physical and spiritual fusion of lives.*²⁷

What are we doing? the Richard Nelsons ask us. They try to shake us out of our mindless rush. They urge us to think, to investigate the more-than-personal consequences of our choices. Then they detail the consequences step by step, the intricate, hidden trail from the Levi’s we are wearing to the hopeless crowding and poisoned water just across the Mexican border.²⁸ From the timbers in our attic to the clearcut hillsides and silted streams of the Tongass National Forest. From the inexpensive horseradish sauce in our refrigerator door to the six-fold decline in the number of waterfowl migrating through the Klamath basin wetlands over the last 40 years.

The destruction of habitat; the rupture of the protective ozone layer; desertification from global warming; the pollution of rivers and ground water; the explosion of asthma related to air pollution; the loss of cropland to urban sprawl; the wholesale, unprotected hand use of DDT in southeast Asia even today; the lost of half of the topsoil of the Great Plains because of mechanized agriculture; the collapse of cod and marine turtle populations; the bleached coral reefs; the destruction of forests on every continent; the creation of Love Canals and Chernobyls by heavy industry; the disappearance of many species of amphibians.



The list goes on. It rings like a catalog of biblical plagues, but now on a global scale.

And the voices also have a prophetic ring. Recall that the original meaning of the word prophet was not one who foretells the future but one who speaks on behalf of spiritual truth. And in these voices one senses the suspicion that the greatest destruction, the loss that enables all of the other losses, is the loss of union, the divorce from that other, larger consciousness, that “same fixed gaze that contains us” all. And the suspicion that the fragmentation and autism of modern life are less the cause of all these natural plagues than the consequence along with them of that one primal loss of union.

You may not be as aware of the mystical note among these new voices of the land. Lopez remarks how carefully naturalists try to keep their spirituality “free of religious commentary.”²⁹ They might casually mention the words “spiritual” or “mystical,” but thereafter you are on your own. You have to look for the evidence because they don’t advertise it. Perhaps they don’t have a language for it, even though much nature writing today culminates in a breakout. “In the warm afternoon stillness I have a sense of coming through, of seeing beyond,”³⁰ writes Ann Zwinger. One gets the sense that this seeing beyond, this coming through is what these writers are seeking. Lopez reverses the metaphor without changing the fundamental meaning: “Looking for a way back in’ [to nature] is a striking characteristic of the modern naturalist’s frame of mind.” “Pay[ing] attention to the mystery,”³¹ he adds, is what being a naturalist has come to mean to him.

Here we have the essentials, “paying attention” to the dirt for the purpose of finding “a way back in.” A breaking out or a breaking back in—in either metaphor there is a release from separation, a reconnection with what was lost, a reunion with “the mystery.” It is as if these writ-



ers “were continually feeling along the surface of a great rock face, in search of the slightest fissure, a discontinuity that might afford entry beyond the rock to a numinal reality which both underlay and transcended the stone facade.”³²

Zwinger’s work provides a good demonstration of this mystical underpinning in the new voices of the land. She speaks of herself as a practical, down-to-earth person,³³ not a closet nature mystic. She is anchored here in this reality. You can see that in her willingness to “start with the dirt” in her writings. She engages her reader’s curiosity with striking attention to the particulars and then satisfies it with a cascade of historical detail, personal experience, and scientific insight. She puts her body on the line without disguising her fears about crawling across a narrow ledge above a desert canyon or camping with spiders and crabs for company in Robinson Crusoe’s cave on a lonely Pacific island.³⁴ This con-

sistent honesty and attention to detail make her steps beyond the rationalist’s walls more believable.

Like many of these writers, she observes that beauty triggers the first infatuation with nature for many people, “that day before spring when the first fruit tree blossom bursts out, the breathtaking flash of sunlight after a rain, mountains lined up along the horizon, aspen trees golden in the fall sunshine, raindrops dancing on a lake.”³⁵ But she does not paint nature as always golden or dancing. She observes that a healing blend of acceptance, heightened awareness, and peace can come from sustained, intense contact with a nature that is neither benevolent nor subservient:

*“One comes to the peculiar, peaceful kind of acceptance one achieves living out-of-doors, a recognition that you are not master of your fate by virtue of roofs and brick walls, but are as subject to the elements as a scorpion or a raccoon or a cactus pad. One becomes increasingly attuned, watchful and aware....”*³⁶

Then come the surprised moments when the watchfulness finds the fissure and breaks through the separation of self. She shifts into a new gear beyond all scientific propriety. Here she is studying a desert lily before sketching it in her trail journal. Notice how the locus of “I” changes during the description:

*The appearance of the lily on the page was the future, but I’d already seen that lily in my mind’s eye, turned it in my hand, seen all lilies in this lily, known dryness in my roots, spreading in my leaves, sunshine polishing my stalk. Because of that lily, which I’d never seen until a few days ago, I knew all about waiting for enough warmth, also about cool dawns and wilting noons, how aroma communicates and stamens speak. Because of that lily I knew about desert heat and winter sleep and what the desert demands.*³⁷



Again, watching a pair of mallards arrive at and then lift off the pond near her house, she lifts off with them.

*The wind cut sharp, shirred the surface, and the ducks lifted off. I watched them until they disappeared against a lowering sky, inordinately pleased and reassured, knowing they would return. Only minutes had passed, yet I glimpsed unknown distant waters, skimmed over cattails, stirred up duckweeds. ...I knew, for a moment, the buoyancy of water. Wind flowed under my wing feathers, and the treetops spun away beneath me even as my feet remained on the wooden-plank deck.*³⁸

For the moment the boundaries are gone. There is no separation. Lily, mallard, writer, and reader are all the same breathing music. The disastrous divorce is no more. The way back in is open. The mystery is no longer an abstraction but an earth-bound flight, a lived experience. Harmony is the living single gaze that contains us all.

Then it passes. The door snaps shut. We face one another separate beings again. I am not you nor am I duck or lily.

But if it could be sustained... Or even if the breakthrough were valued... and sought... That is what these new voices of the land inspire. And what they foretell.

They tell us that there are consequences to this discipline of attention to the dirt, practiced formally by the naturalist, but also by many an amateur naturalist, hiker, gardener, outdoorsman, sunrise gazer, ocean watcher, painter, tree hugger, dancer, rock climber, photographer, kayaker, fly fisherman—just as there are consequences to *cogito ergo sum*. “I happen to believe,” Zwinger’s words swing between lighthearted and searching, “that being a naturalist relieves insomnia, stops headaches and heals sundry discomforts, solves all problems and soothes all pain, cures boredom and hangnails, and offers an open-ended, continually expanding, fascinating exploration into distant deserts of the mind and hillsides of the heart... As a natural history writer, I write

for love of the natural world.... I am... in love with what grows and stalks, slithers and trills, whiffles and sneezes.”³⁹

She calls the discipline of the naturalist an excuse for wandering, which, she concludes, “is an inexpensive ticket to another level of being.”⁴⁰ That may be the key. Without a new level of being, without a sustainable uplifting of the (human) forces now changing the earth, Zwinger and Lopez may be voices crying in the wilderness, but not in the hearts of men and women nor in the cities nor in the future.



References

1. J. G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 43.
2. A. Zwinger, *Wind in the Rock: The Canyonlands of Southeastern Utah*.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 55.
4. Simic, in R. Bly, *News of the Universe*, p. 248.
5. K. Rexroth, in R. Bly, *News of the Universe*, p. 136.
6. Quoted in R. Heffern “Thomas Berry,” *National Catholic Reporter*, Vol. 37, 8/10/01, p. 5.
7. This reading uses the phrase as a convenient shorthand for the direction of Western thought, not the only possible outcome of the words. Bly notes that Descartes thought he was saying something liberating with the words, but the position they expressed was not new. He says that the French philosopher added an “internal combustion engine” to a viewpoint likely present to some degree from the beginning of human thought.
8. R. Bly, *News of the Universe*, p. 22.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 9..
11. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
16. B. H. Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*, p. 250.
17. This list is, of course, by no means exhaustive.
18. G. Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 51-52.
19. J. W. Krutch, *The Desert Year*, pp. 37-38.
20. G. Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 40.
21. Quoted in B. C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, p. 64.
22. D. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 117.
23. B. H. Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*, p. 199.
24. R. Nelson, *The Island Within*, p. 38.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Complements of the way “free trade” agreements like NAFTA are implemented.
29. B. H. Lopez, “The Naturalist,” *Orión Magazine*, Autumn 2001, p. 40.
30. A. Zwinger, *The Nearsighted Naturalist*, p. 84.
31. B. H. Lopez, “The Naturalist,” *Orión Magazine*, p. 43.
32. B. C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, p. 16.
33. A. Zwinger, *The Nearsighted Naturalist*, p. 289.
34. The cave is on Más a Tierra, a volcanic island off the coast of Chile, where Alexander Selkirk, model for Defoe’s Crusoe character, lived for four years. See A. Zwinger, *The Nearsighted Naturalist*, p. 181.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 267, 289.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

All Nature is simply ... the Seer-Will, the Knowledge-Force of the Conscious Being at work to evolve in force and form all the inevitable truth of the Idea into which it has originally thrown itself. —Sri Aurobindo



Source Material

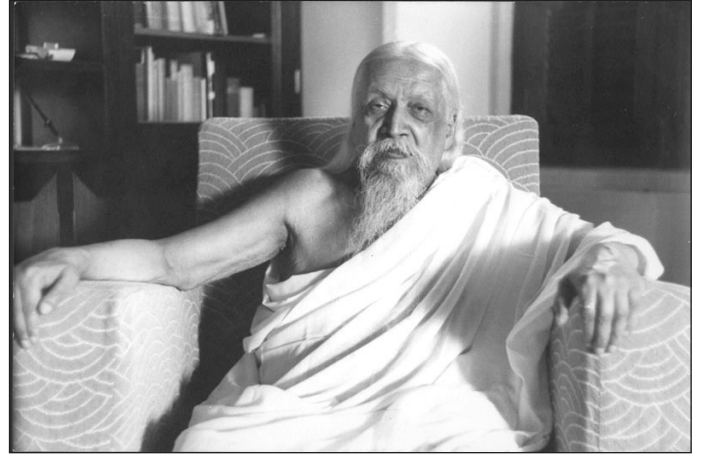
On the Buddhist Nirvana

by Sri Aurobindo

Buddhist teaching does not recognise any inner self or soul—there is only a stream of consciousness from moment to moment—the consciousness itself is only a bundle of associations—it is kept moving by the wheel of Karma. If the associations are untied and thrown away (they are called *samskaras*), then it dissolves; the idea of self or a persistent person ceases; the stream flows no longer, the wheel stops. There is left, according to some, *Sunya*, a mysterious Nothing from which all comes; according to others a mysterious Permanent in which there is no individual existence. This is Nirvana. Buddha himself always refused to say what there was beyond cosmic existence; he spoke neither of God nor Self nor Brahman. He said there was no utility in discussing that—all that was necessary was to know the causes of this unhappy temporal existence and the way to dissolve it.

Buddha, it must be remembered, refused always to discuss what was beyond the world. But from the little he said it would appear that he was aware of a Permanent beyond equivalent to the Vedantic Para-Brahman, but which he was quite unwilling to describe. The denial of anything beyond the world except a negative state of Nirvana was a later teaching, not Buddha's.

If Buddha really combated and denied all Vedantic conceptions of the Self, then it can be no longer true that Buddha refrained from all metaphysical speculations or distinct pronouncements as to the nature of the ultimate Reality. The view you take of his conception of Nirvana seems to concur with the Mahayanist interpretation and its conception of the Permanent, *dhruvam*, which could be objected to as a later development like the opposite Nihilistic conception of the *Shunyam*. What Buddha very certainly taught was that the world is not-Self and that the individual has no true existence since what does exist in the world is a stream of impermanent consciousness from moment to moment and the individual person is fictitiously constituted by a bundle of *samskaras* and can be dissolved by dissolving the bundle. This is in conformity with the Vedantic Monistic view that there is no true separate individual. As to the other Vedantic view of the one Self, impersonal and universal and transcendent, it does not seem that Buddha made any distinct and unmistakable pronouncement on abstract and metaphysical questions; but if the world or all in the world is not-Self, *anātman*, there can be no more room for a universal Self, only at most for a transcendent Real Being. His conception of Nirvana was of something transcendent of the universe, but he did not define what it was because he was not concerned with any abstract metaphysical speculations



about the Reality; he must have thought them unnecessary and irrelevant, and any indulgence in them likely to divert from the true object. His explanation of things was psychological and not metaphysical and his methods were all psychological, the breaking up of the false associations of consciousness which cause the continuance of desire and suffering, so getting rid of the stream of birth and death in a purely phenomenal (not unreal) world; the method of life by which this liberation could be effected was also a psychological method, the eightfold path developing right understanding and right action. His object was pragmatic and severely practical and so were his methods; metaphysical speculations would only draw the mind away from the one thing needful.

As to Buddha's attitude towards life, I do not quite see how "service to mankind" or any ideal of improvement of the world-existence can have been part of his aim, since to pass out of life into a transcendence was his object. His eightfold path was the means towards that end and not an aim in itself or indeed in any way an aim. Obviously, if right understanding and right action become the common rule of life, there would be a great improvement in the world, but for Buddha's purpose that could be an incidental result and not at all part of his central object. You say, "Buddha himself urged the necessity to serve mankind; his ideal was to achieve a consciousness of inner eternity and then be a source of radiant influence and action." But where and when did Buddha say these things, use these terms or express these ideas? "The service of mankind" sounds like a very modern and European conception; it reminds me of some European interpretations of the Gita as merely teaching the disinterested performance of duty or the pronouncement that the whole idea of the Gita is service. The exclusive stress or over-stress on mankind or humanity is also European. Mahayanist Buddhism laid stress on compassion, fellow-feeling with all, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, just as the Gita speaks of the feeling of oneness with all beings and preoccupation with the good of all beings, *sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ*, but this does not mean humanity only, but all beings and *vasudhā* means all earth-life. Are there any sayings of Buddha which would justify the statement that the object or one object



in attaining to Nirvana was to become a source of radiant influence and action? The consciousness of inner eternity may have that result, but can we really say that that was Buddha's ideal, the object which he held in view or for which he came?

The Buddhist Nirvana and the Adwaitin's Moksha are the same thing. It corresponds to a realisation in which one does not feel oneself any longer as an individual with such a name or such a form, but an infinite eternal Self spaceless (even when in space), timeless (even when in time). Note that one can perfectly well do actions in that condition and it is not to be gained only by Samadhi.

It [*the Nirvana of the Buddha*] is the same [*as the Nirvana of the Gita*]. Only the Gita describes it as Nirvana in the Brahman while the Buddha preferred not to give any name or say anything about that into which the nirvana took place. Some later schools of Buddhists described it as Sunya, the equivalent of the Chinese Tao, described as the Nothing which is everything.

The feeling of the Self as a vast peaceful Void, a liberation from existence as we know it, is one that one can always have, Buddhist or no Buddhist. It is the negative aspect of Nirvana—it is quite natural for the mind, if it follows the negative movement of withdrawal, to get that first, and if you lay hold on that and refuse to go farther, being satisfied with this liberated Non-Existence, then you will naturally philosophise like the Buddhists that Shunya is the eternal truth. Lao Tse is more perspicacious when he spoke of it as the Nothing that is All. Many of course have the positive experience of the Atman first, not as a void but as pure unrelated Existence like the Adwaitins (Shankara) or as the one Existent.

The impressions in the approach to Infinity or the entry into it are not always quite the same; much depends on the way in which the mind approaches it. It is felt first by some as an infinity above, by others as an infinity around into which the mind disappears (as an energy) by losing its limits. Some feel not the absorption of the mind-energy into the infinite, but a falling entirely inactive; others feel it as a lapse or disappearance of energy into pure Existence. Some first feel the infinity as a vast existence into which all sinks or disappears, others, as you describe it, as an infinite ocean of Light above, others as an infinite ocean of Power above. If certain schools of Buddhists felt it in their experience as a limitless Shunya, the Vedantists, on the contrary, see it as a positive Self-Existence featureless and absolute. No doubt, the various experiences were erected into various philosophies, each putting its conception as definitive; but behind each conception there was such an experience. What you describe as a completely emptied mind-substance devoid of energy or light, completely inert, is the condition of neutral peace and empty stillness which is or can be a stage of the liberation. But it can afterwards feel itself filled with infinite existence, consciousness (carrying energy in it) and finally Ananda. (CWSA, Vol. 29, *Letters on Yoga II*, pp. 428-435)

From On the Dhammapada

by the Mother

Those who take error for truth, and the truth for error, will never attain the supreme goal, for they are led astray by vain desires and false views.

A comment could be added; for, if one were satisfied with taking error for truth and truth for error, it should be logically very easy to make one's choice as soon as one found for some reason or other or with some help, what is truly the truth and what is truly the error; one adopts the truth and rejects the error. But unfortunately one loves one's error, somewhere in the being there is an unwillingness to recognise what is true.

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

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

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

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

Those who know the true to be true and the false to be false, they attain the supreme goal, for they pursue right desires and correct views.

We saw last time that it is not sufficient to be able to distinguish what is right from what is wrong. At first sight this seems to be the most difficult point. It is quite obvious that if everyone had to find it out for himself, it would be very long work; you can pass your whole life going through innumerable experiences which little by little will enlighten you as to what is right and what is not.



Therefore it is easier to rely on someone who has done the work before you and whom you have simply to ask, "Is this true? Is that false?" Evidently, that offers a great advantage, but unfortunately it is not always sufficient; for if you have the desire that things should be in a certain way and that what you prefer should be right, then you are not always ready to listen to good advice.

The last sentence, "for they pursue right desires," which seems to be commonplace, is perhaps the most difficult part of the problem.

In this book, in this teaching, there are short sentences that appear so simple. If you read without sufficient reflection, you tell yourself, "But it is self-evident, you recognise as true what is true and as false what is false, what does that mean then?" But first of all it is not so easy to distinguish what is true from what is not, then to recognise, that is to say, to admit that a certain thing is true; and above all it is more difficult still perhaps to recognise that a certain thing is false.

In reality, in order to discern exactly what is false requires such sincerity in the aspiration, such resolution in the will to be true that even this little phrase "to know the true to be true and the false to be false" means a very considerable realisation. And the conclusion, "they attain the supreme goal" is a great promise.

There are teachings which say that one must have no desire at all; they are the ones that aim at a complete withdrawal from life in order to enter into the immobility of the Spirit, the absence of all activity, all movement, all form, all external reality. To attain that one must have no desire at all, that is to say, one must completely leave behind all will for progress; progress itself becomes something unreal and external. But if in your conception of Yoga you keep the idea of progress, and if you admit that the whole universe follows a progression, then what you have to do is to shift the objective of desire; instead of turning it towards things that are external, artificial, superficial and egoistical, you must join it as a force of realisation to the aspiration directed to the truth.

These few words, "they pursue right desires," are a proof that the teaching of the Buddha, in its essence, did not turn away from the realisation upon earth, but only from what is false in the conception of the world and in activities as they are carried on in the world. Thus when he teaches that one must escape from life, it is

not to escape from a life that would be the expression of the truth but from the illusory life as it is ordinarily lived in the world.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that in order to reach the Truth and to have the power of realising this Truth you must join the spiritual consciousness to a progressive mental consciousness.

And these few words certainly prove that such was the original conception of the Buddhist teaching. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 3, *Questions and Answers 1929-1931*, pp. 191-194.

Vigilance is the way that leads to immortality (or Nirvana). Negligence is the way that leads to death. Those who are vigilant do not die. Those who are negligent are dead already.

In these texts the word Nirvana is not used in the sense of annihilation, as you see, but in the sense of an eternal existence in opposition to life and death, as we know them in the present earthly existence, which are contrary to each other: life contrary to death, death contrary to life. It is not that life which is spoken of, but the eternal existence which is beyond life and death--the true existence.

Vigilance means to be awake, to be on one's guard, to be sincere—never to be taken by surprise. When you want to do sadhana, at each moment of your life, there is a choice between taking a step that leads to the goal and falling asleep or sometimes even going backwards, telling yourself, "Oh, later on, not immediately"—sitting down on the way.

To be vigilant is not merely to resist what pulls you downward, but above all to be alert in order not to lose any opportunity to progress, any opportunity to overcome a weakness, to resist a temptation, any opportunity to learn something, to correct something, to master something. If you are vigilant, you can do in a few days what would otherwise take years. If you are vigilant, you change each circumstance of your life, each action, each movement into an occasion for coming nearer the goal.

There are two kinds of vigilance, active and passive. There is a vigilance that gives you a warning if you are about to make a mistake, if you are making a wrong choice, if you are being weak or allowing yourself to be tempted, and there is the active vigilance which seeks an opportunity to progress, seeks to utilise every circumstance to advance more quickly.

And both are absolutely necessary.

He who is not vigilant is already dead. He has lost contact with the true purpose of existence and of life.

So the hours, circumstances, life pass in vain, bringing nothing, and you awake from your somnolence in a hole from which it is very difficult to escape. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 3, *Questions and Answers 1929-1931*, pp. 202-203).

Negligence truly means the relaxation of the will which makes one forget his goal and pass his time in doing all kinds of things which, far from contributing towards the goal to be attained, stop you on the path and often turn you away from it. Therefore the flame of aspiration makes the Bhikkhu shun negligence. —The Mother from *On the Dhammapada*



Poetry room

The world game

In god-years yet unmeasured by a man's thought or by the earth's dance or the moon's spin
I have guarded the law of the Invisible for the sake of thy smile, O sweet;
While lives followed innumerable winged lives, as if birds crossing a wide sea,
I have watched on the path of the centuries for the light of thy running feet.

The earth's dancing with the sun in his fire-robcs, was it not thou circling my flame-soul,
The gazings of the moon in its nectar-joy were my look questing for thee through Space?
The world's haste and the racing of the tense mind and the long gallop of fleet years
Were my speed to arrive through the flux of things and to neighbour at last thy face.

The earth's seeking is mine and the immense scope of the slow aeons my heart's way;
For I follow a secret and sublime Will and the steps of thy Mother-might.
In the dim brute and the peering of man's brain and the calm sight in a god's eyes
It is I questing in Life's broken ways for thy laughter and love and light.

When Time moved not nor yet Space was unrolled wide, for thy game of the worlds I gave
Myself to thy delightful hands of power to govern me and move and drive;
To earth's dumbness I fell for thy desire's sport weaving my spirit stuff
In a million pattern-shapes of souls made with me alive.

The worlds are only a playfield of Thou-I and a hued masque of the Two-One,
I am in thee as thou art in me, O Love; we are closer than heart and breast;
From thee I leaped forth struck to a spirit spark, I mount back in the soul's fire;
To our motion the stars whirl in the swing of Time, our oneness is Nature's rest.

When Light first from the unconscious Immense burst to create nebula and sun
'Twas the meeting of our hands through the empty Night that enkindled the fearful blaze;
The huge systems abandoned their inert trance and this green crater of life rose
That we might look on each other form and form from the depths of a living gaze.

The mind travelled in its ranges tier on tier with its wide-eyed or its rapt thought,
My thought toiling laboured to know all myself in thee to our atoms and widths and deeps,
My all yearns to thy all to be held close, to the heart heart and to self self,
As a sea with a sea joins or limbs with limbs, and as waking's delight with sleep's.

When mind pinnacled is lost in thy Light-Vasts and the man drowns in the wide god,
Thy Truth shall ungirdle its golden flames and thy diamond whiteness blaze;
My souls lumined shall discover their joy-self, they shall clasp all in the near One,
And the sorrow of the heart shall turn to bliss and thy sweetness possess earth's days.

Then shall life be thy arms drawing thy own clasped to thy breast's rapture or calm peace,
With thy joy for the spirit's immortal flame and thy peace for its deathless base.
Our eyes meeting the long love shut in deep eyes and our beings held fast and one,
I shall know that the game was well worth the toil whose end is thy divine embrace.

—Sri Aurobindo



I should know better

I should know better than to grumble, Mother,
And indeed I do,
But why is it that after we have drunk the nectar,
From the bottom of the cup we have to drain the bitter lees?
Is it the last drop before we reach heaven,
Or is there no end to these fathomless seas?
Do we all, like Shiva,
Have to drink the entire portion of pollution
That lies at the bottom of our own bottomless ocean
And will the churning never end?

Sometimes it all seems over, we're sure it's over,
Our river flowing clear and bright,
But then we only have to round a bend
To find it dark and murky, an endless night
That leaves us wondering if all the work was not in vain.
You tell us not to complain:
One there was who taught us
That all that's found must again be sought,
That each enemy slain revives.
There are myths and fables that tell us the same:
Each battle is fought and refought.
But He also assures us that
The gulf is bridged twixt the depths and the heights.
So it only seems in vain. Don't you believe us?

No, Mother no. I believe.

So be of good cheer my Heart
Be of good cheer,
We have work still here
Today our river flows bright and clear.

One day we will have come to the end of our nights
And we too will see the golden waters that pour
Down the sapphire mountain rainbow-ridged,
And glimmer from shore to shore.
Strong currents will rush down to the hidden deeps
And the poison will rise to where Heaven keeps
The nectar that sets it free
To merge in the world's wide heart of pure felicity.

—Maggi Lidchi-Grassi (from her book, *Seeds*)

From The Dream

Our life is twofold: Sleep hath its own world,
A boundary between the things misnamed
Death and existence: Sleep has its own world,
And a wide realm of wild reality,
And dreams in their development have breath,
And tears, and tortures, and the touch of joy;

They leave a weight upon our waking thoughts,
They take a weight from off our waking toils,
They do divide our being; they become
A portion of ourselves as of our time,
And look like heralds of eternity:
They pass like spirits of the past,—they speak
Like sybils of the future; they have power—
The tyranny of pleasure and of pain;
They make us what we were not—what they will,
And shake us with the vision that's gone by,
The dread of vanish'd shadows—Are they so?
Is not the past all shadow? What are they?
Creations of the mind? —The mind can make
Substance, and people planets of its own
With beings brighter than have been, and give
A breath to forms which can outlive all flesh.
I would recall a vision which I dream'd
Perchance in sleep—or in itself a thought,
A slumbering thought, is capable of years,
And curdles a long life into one hour.

I saw two beings in the hues of youth
Standing upon a hill, a gentle hill
Green and of mild declivity, the last
As't were the cape of a long ridge of such,
Save that there was no sea to lave its base,
But a most living landscape, and the wave
Of woods and cornfields, and the abodes of men
Scatter'd at intervals, and wreathing smoke
Arising from such rustic roofs; —the hill
Was crown'd a peculiar diadem
Of trees, in circular array, so fix'd,
Not by the sport of nature, but of man;
These two, a maiden and a youth, were there
Gazing—the one on all there was beneath
Fair as herself—but the boy gazed on her;
And both were young—yet not alike in youth.
As the sweet moon on the horizon's verge,
The maid was on the eve of womanhood;
The boy had fewer summers, but his heart
Had far outgrown his years, and to his eye
There was but one beloved face on earth,
And that was shining on him: he had look'd
Upon it till it could not pass away;
He had no breath, no being, but in hers;
She was his voice: he did not speak to her,
But trembled on her words she was his sight,
For his eye follow'd hers, and saw with hers,
Which colour'd all his objects: —he had ceased
To live within himself; she was his life,
The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
Which terminated all.

—Lord Byron



Apropos

It is by the thought that we dissipate ourselves in the phenomenal; it is by the gathering back of the thought into itself that we must draw ourselves back into the real. —Sri Aurobindo

People tell you, “I can’t do otherwise”—it is because in the depths of their heart they *do not want* to do otherwise; they have accepted to be the slaves of their vice. There is a moment when one accepts. —The Mother

You are today where your thoughts have brought you. You will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you. —James Allen

First say to yourself what you would be and then do what you have to do. —Epictetus

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an action, but a habit. —Aristotle

The universe is always sending you inspiration, you just have to listen and allow. —Linda Armstrong

A man who uses his hands is a labourer. One who uses his hands and mind is a craftsman. But he who uses his hands, his mind and his heart is an artist. —St. Francis of Assisi

Don’t only practice your art, but force your way into its secrets, for it and knowledge can raise men to the Divine. —Ludwig Van Beethoven

Remember, it is not where you come from, or not even where you are, it is where you are going that matters most. —Bo Bennett

If you would learn the secret of right relations, look only for the divine in people and things, and leave all the rest to God. —J. Allen Boone

Happiness does not depend on what you have or who you are... It solely relies on what you think. —The Buddha

Every moment of your life is infinitely creative, and the universe is endlessly bountiful. Just put forth a clear enough request, and everything your heart desires must come to you. —Shakti Gawain

Within you now and always is the unborn possibility of a limitless experience of inner stability and outer treasure, and yours is the privilege of giving birth to it, and you will, if you can believe. —Eric Butterworth

It doesn’t matter whether your thoughts and feelings are good or bad, you are giving them out, and they will return to you as automatically and precisely as an echo returns the same words you send out. —Rhonda Byrne

The life of your dreams, everything you would love to be, do or have, has always been closer to you than you knew... because the power to everything you want is inside you. —Rhonda Byrne

Doing what you love is the cornerstone of having abundance in your life. —Wayne Dyer

If you want to be happy, set a goal that commands your thoughts, liberates your energy, and inspires your hope. —Andrew Carnegie

It’s our duty as men and women to proceed as though the limits to our abilities do not exist. We are collaborators in creation... the future of the earth is in our hands. —Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

One of the unique things about the human brain is that it can do only what it thinks it can do. The minute you say ‘my memory isn’t what it used to be’ or ‘I can’t remember a thing today.’ You are actually training your brain to live up to your diminished expectations. —Deepak Chopra

Don’t be afraid of the space between your dreams and reality. If you can dream it, you can make it so. —Belva Davis

Live out of your imagination, not your history. —Stephen Covey

When there is no love, pour in love and you shall draw out love. —St. John of the Cross

We are all affecting our world every moment, whether we mean to or not. Our actions and states of mind matter because we’re so deeply interconnected with one another. —Ram Dass

The things you say about others also say a lot about you. —Mark Amend

Your Soul Signature is your spiritual DNA—who you are at your core, the most authentic part of you. When we begin to tap into our inherent power, step out of the shadows of fear and self-doubt, and begin living and speaking our truth, we’re healthier, happier and in harmony with ourselves. —Panache Desai

