

# Collaboration

Spring 2016

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 41, No. 1



Eric Hughes (1931–2016)

A visit to India by David Hutchinson •  
Surrender in *Savitri* by Jamshed Mavawalla •  
“To sweep God’s temple-floors” by Angelo Salerno •  
Spiritual practicality: The need of the moment by Beloo Mehra •  
Sri Aurobindo and J.S. Bach: A personal experience by Zacharia Moursi •  
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry room • Apropos



## About the cover

Front cover: We dedicate this issue to Eric Hughes, who for many years was the editor and distributor of *Collaboration*. Along with Sam Spanier, Eric codirected the Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in Mt. Tremper, NY, near Woodstock, from 1968 until his passing on 6 March 2016. Whereas Sam was gregarious and more "out front," Eric was a more quiet and diligent worker, who translated the whole of *Mother's Agenda* and other works by Satprem. He regularly read various texts on the Yoga to the residents and visitors during the evening meditations, maintained the library, and worked for the center in many other capacities.

## The authors and poets

**Alan** (Alan@auroville.org.in) is a long-time Aurovilian from England involved in teaching as well as in writing and editing for Auroville Today.

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**Edward Carpenter** (1844–1929) was an English socialist, poet, writer, philosopher, anthologist, and early LGBT activist.

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**Shyam Kumari** (shyamkumari@auromail.net), an Ashramite, is an author of many books, publishes a Hindi magazine, and runs a Sanskrit institute.

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**Nirodbaran** was a physician and one of Sri Aurobindo's personal assistants; he took dictation during the later years of the composition of *Savitri*.

**Angelo Salerno** (salerno\_51@hotmail.com), formerly a resident of Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, now lives in Auroville and is working at the town hall.

**Larry Seidlitz** (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is an author, the editor of *Collaboration*, an instructor of on-line courses on Integral Yoga, and a freelance editor.

**Norman Thomas (Navoditte)** was an early Aurovilian and devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

**William Wordsworth** (1770–1850) was a major English Romantic poet. Wordsworth's magnum opus is generally considered to be *The Prelude*, a semiautobiographical poem of his early years that he revised and expanded a number of times.

# Table of contents

Collaboration, vol. 41, no. 1, Spring 2016

## From the office of *Collaboration*

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

## Current affairs

Passing of Eric Hughes..... Julian Lines 4

Some websites and blogs related to the Integral Yoga ..... 5

## AV almanac

Joy of Learning experiment..... Alan 6

## Salon

"To sweep God's temple-floors..." ..... Angelo Salerno 8

Spiritual practicality: The need of the moment..... Beloo Mehra 9

Sri Aurobindo and J.S. Bach A personal experience..... Zacharia Moursi 11

## Chronicles

A visit to India ..... David Hutchinson 12

## Essays

Surrender in *Savitri*..... Jamshed Mavawalla 21

## Source material

Faith and the Divine Shakti..... Sri Aurobindo 29

Faith and resistance..... The Mother 31

## The poetry room

Kingdoms of the greater knowledge..... Sri Aurobindo 33

*From The Prelude* ..... William Wordsworth 33

My soul is filling with light ..... Nirodbaran 34

The Tribute ..... Shyam Kumari 34

Greatest mystery ..... Vikas Bamba 34

*From The world-spirit*..... Edward Carpenter 35

Do you remember?..... Norman Thomas (Navoditte) 35

**Apropos** ..... 36



## From the office of Collaboration

We begin this issue in Current Affairs with a remembrance of Eric Hughes, the co-founder of Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, who passed away recently, written by long-time associate Julian Lines. This is followed by a list of many of the most important and interesting websites and blogs related to the Integral Yoga.

In AV Almanac, we have an interview by Alan with the members of a new experiment in collective learning called the Joy of Learning. It focuses on bringing out the insights of various concerned people on the major issues and challenges facing Auroville, in order to bring to the community important information and greater awareness so that more effective actions may be taken in addressing them.

In our Salon section, we have three short articles. The first, by Angelo Salerno, is a reflection on one of Sri Aurobindo's aphorisms. Angelo explains the utility of humble service, but also the importance of keeping the inner temple of one's own soul clean and carefully tended. The second is by Beloo Mehra, and is focused on spiritual practicality as the way out of the present crises that are afflicting the world from every direction. The third is by Zacharia Moursi; it is a reflection on the author's inner relation with Bach's music and its connection with his spiritual path in the Integral Yoga.

In Chronicles, David Hutchinson reflects on his recent trip to India, including to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. He gives us a taste of the adventure and convolution of India, its incomparable blend of mystery and misery, with both thoughtful insight and delicious humor. He discusses, among other things, the feel of the Integral Yoga, the Ashram, Auroville, the Matrimandir, Pondicherry, an ancient temple, and India's rapidly changing physical, social, technological, and ecological environment. The article is complemented with photographs by Dave and editor Larry Seidlitz.

In Essays, we have a talk by Jamshed Mavawalla, an associate of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, about spiritual surrender as it is expressed in Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*. Of course, surrender is one of the fundamental pillars of Integral Yoga, and through his examination of its treatment in *Savitri*, and his reflections on these passages, he brings out many important insights into the nature of the inner surrender that we are called upon to deliver, together with its spiritual consequences.

In Source Material, we have important essays by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which complement Jamshed's article; they regard faith in the divine Shakti and its power to transform us, as well as the resistance to that faith that we all face. We get in these extended passages something very central and crucial about the path to success in the Integral Yoga, both in theory and in experience.

We close the issue with a fine 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 *any topic related to Integral Yoga*. We would like to publish a few of the best submissions in a new section called "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 in each of our future issues. For the next issue, please email your essay to the editor at: [editor@collaboration.org](mailto:editor@collaboration.org) before August 1, 2016.

### Photographers

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

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

**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

### Passing of Eric Hughes

by Julian Lines

*No word from you in awhile. I hope all is well. For me, not so well. My back is still very stiff and moving about is hard. But I am still functioning, though I do think about how long that will last. Blessedly I have friends who look after me, but I do think about the end and am not at all disturbed by the idea. I think I have lived long enough and have had a rich life. I don't feel any regrets and I am fortunate to have met so many wonderful people . . .* Eric Hughes 1931-2016

Born in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania, where he enjoyed school, his neighborhood, and family, Eric seemed to have had quite a happy childhood. He loved the fact that he could use Google Maps to see his old neighborhood and the house in which he was born. He seemed to have a glowing nostalgia about his friends and especially his cousin, Peggy, who was the same age, and he was so pleased to be with her during a visit last summer.

He didn't strike me as one who would have enjoyed the army, but he loved to reminisce about his service: learning to shoot a gun, working in the kitchen, and living on the bases in the South.

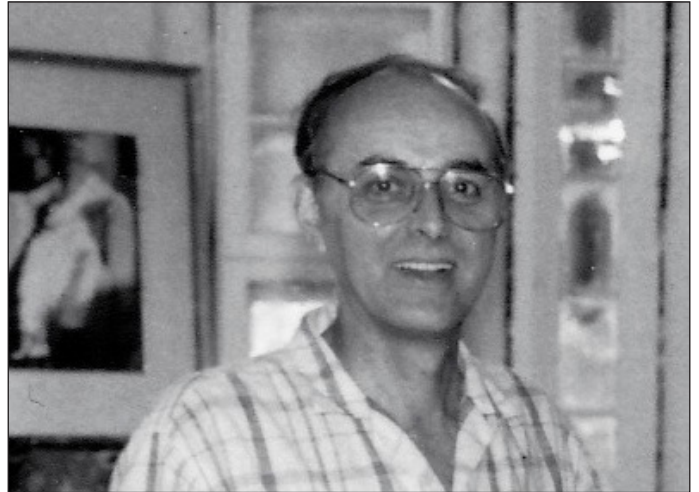
He was proud of receiving the Edward Albee award for his play "The Empty Room" and had a deep love of the theater. He enjoyed the opera and wept immersed in Wagner. He rejoiced in the sharpness of Judge Judy or the cleverness of Judi Dench, but often commented that he otherwise didn't watch TV, though it was on "in the background" while he knitted or did crosswords.

When thinking about Eric Hughes and his service to the Integral Yoga community over the past 55 years, first comes his work translating *Mother's Agenda* from French into English. All thirteen volumes. He did it at first just for the community living at Matagiri, but soon for another 10, 15, 20 who started "subscribing" to the installments, all copied, collated, and mailed out to the eager audience. Satprem and the Institute were at first unaware of this Herculean effort, but later welcomed it as a base from which to make their "official" translation.

And then look through the thousands of photographs taken of visitors to Matagiri, dutifully named and mounted over the years. Eric enjoyed photos until the end of his life and I always made a point of sending him some as I did recently from Auroville so he could see some of his favorite people.

And then there is the Matagiri Library with thousands of books with their library cards in the back of each one. He requested that visitors always leave the books on the table so he could be sure they were returned to their proper place.

But I think what impressed me most was sending out this publication, *Collaboration*. At its peak, *Collaboration* was mailed



Eric in earlier times. (Photo courtesy Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center)

out free of charge to over 5000 people around the world. I remember friends in Auroville telling me they used to find out what was going on with the other side of the community from receiving it. Even today, many Ashramites identify Matagiri with *Collaboration*. While its origins lie with Muriel Spanier, Sam's cousin who lived at Matagiri with her husband, Joe, it was Eric who typed out the labels for each issue. From the index cards. One by one.

Actually, Eric maintained TWO sets of index cards, one in alphabetical order and another in zip code order; by hand; with individual notes.

Stunned at the time spent and the repetition of the task, I suggested to automate and that he at least make a master list and xerox them onto the labels, but it was true that Americans moved around and the list was constantly changing. And Eric liked to do things his way. And that often meant that he would say exactly what he thought, often with a teasing twinkle, but sometimes not. He was a very quick study, seeing into people right away, dismissing those who weren't serious and delighting in those who were sincere in their spiritual search.

His devotion to Matagiri and decades long presence was to my mind, a remarkable karma yoga. And the burden only increased as the community shrunk and Eric typed, edited, and mailed *Collaboration* almost entirely by himself.

This increase in work load combined with a chimney fire while Sam was away for the winter, painting in Paris, led to Eric's first "retirement," transferring *Collaboration* and the book and incense business to yours truly in an office in nearby High Falls, NY. Gordon and Jeanne Korstange took over the editing duties and I did the printing and mailing along with the publication of the Matagiri book catalog. For many years Matagiri had been the largest distributor of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's works outside of India. Gradually the rise of Lotus Light and Auromere took over that market, including special editions under the Lotus Light imprint for the US. But during the mid-eighties books and incense and *Collaboration* were still important activities.



It was a blessing that Eric made the leap to the internet age, having a laptop and email and a digital camera. He had always made the extra effort to master cable TV, the dvd player, the answering machine, and other gadgets. As a “city boy” living in the country, I think his longing for opera and culture motivated him. He loved to listen to WQXR, the classical station from New York and to do the crosswords. In his later years his sleep schedule shifted to the point where he literally went to bed with the sun at 5:30 pm in the winter and awoke before 1 am to “start his day.” So it was wonderful that a community of friends from around the world was there online to greet him during those early morning hours.

As a diabetic, he was very disciplined about monitoring his blood sugar and watching his diet. He loved big dogs and his many cats and couldn’t stand the idea of having to bury another one. This sensitive disposition made him susceptible to ulcers which he controlled through juicing vegetables. Like his partner, Sam, Eric was constantly investigating herbs and vitamins to support his body and mind into his eighty-fourth year.

Besides endless consultations to keep his computer going, we had a weekly reading and meditation with Eric. He always read beautifully with clarity and understanding. I often counted myself as supremely fortunate to have that half hour on Saturday mornings to soak in the wisdom of Sri Aurobindo and Mother with such an eloquent host. Recently Klaus and Maryanne Buchele came to be near Matagiri. Klaus asked Eric numerous questions about the Yoga and brought down the recycling and brought up the *Sunday Times*. While Wendy and I completed our month in India, Maryanne was with Eric in the hospital when he seemed to be having a quick recovery from a mild stroke, and invoked a state of calm and remembrance of Mother and all those who loved him at the end. He was drifting a bit towards the end of her visit. He saw a light in the ceiling, then thought he was at home and then drifted into sleep. The doctor was himself amazed to report that an hour later at 6:30 pm on March 6th Eric had passed away.

Eric was very encouraging about expanding the Center and anything which would help fulfill its original vision given to Sam by the Mother of “linking East and West.” As Sam was drawn to healing and felt inspired to bring that to Matagiri, Eric had hoped young children would spend time at the Center.

After Sam’s passing he complained that he felt “lost” without him and that “Sam was the engine” and he was the caboose. But interestingly, Eric did have revelations and intuitions and guidance on his path.

In 2010 when we held the first All USA Meeting at Matagiri after Sam’s passing, Eric was given a gift. He received a message in his meditation. I asked him to write down his experience to share with others:

Early in the morning I was sitting alone very quietly, very serene and comfortable, almost thoughtless and very calm and at peace. Suddenly these words came to me—in French, as they appear here. Never before had anything like this happened

to me, and certainly not in French. Here are those words: *”Matagiri, c’est un jardin des larmes, pas de tristesse, mais de joie et un éclat de lumière psychique.”*

The translation:

”Matagiri is a garden of tears, not of sadness, but of joy and a burst of psychic light.”

We all owe Eric our deep thanks for tending this garden, often alone, for so many years.

## Some websites and blogs related to the Integral Yoga

<http://www.sriaurobindoashram.org/>  
<http://sabda.sriaurobindoashram.org/>  
<http://www.motherandsriaurobindo.in/>  
<http://www.sriaurobindoashram.net/>  
<http://www.auroville.org/>  
<http://www.auroville-international.org/>  
<http://www.aurosociety.org/>  
<http://www.collaboration.org/>  
<http://foundationforworldeducation.org>  
<http://sasp.collaboration.org/>  
<http://matagiri.org/>  
<https://sriaurobindocenterla.wordpress.com/center/>  
<http://www.aurobindo.net/>  
<http://www.sriaurobindolc.org/>  
<http://iksc.org/>  
<http://www.aurobindo.ru/>  
<http://www.miraura.org/>  
<http://ipi.org.in>  
<http://saccs.org.in/>  
<http://www.sacar.in/>  
<http://gnostic.in/>  
<https://auromere.wordpress.com/>  
<http://www.ire-miraditi.org/>  
<https://sriaurobindostudies.wordpress.com/>  
<http://auroramirabilis.blogspot.in/>  
<https://overmanfoundation.wordpress.com/>  
<http://letbeautybeyourconstantideal.blogspot.in/>  
<https://labofevolution.wordpress.com/>  
<http://sassingapore.blogspot.in/>  
<http://sriaurobindoinsitute.org/>  
<http://www.searchforlight.org/>  
<http://www.kireetjoshiarchives.com/>  
<http://intyoga.online.fr/>  
<http://savitrithethepoem.com/>  
<http://www.motherservice.org/>  
<http://www.lightendlesslight.org/>  
<http://www.mirrabliss.com/>



## AV almanac

### The Joy of Learning experiment

*From an interview by Alan*

*This article is reprinted with permission from the March 2016 issue of Auroville Today.*

**T**he Joy of Learning is an experiment in collective learning which addresses a wide range of themes associated with life in Auroville. It tries to (re)familiarise the residents with important issues in a stimulating and respectful learning environment, and is supported with funding from Stichting de Zaaier.

On 2nd March, the eighth Joy of Learning session took place, on the topic of mobility. Previous sessions have focussed on the Auroville economy, on food and farming, the Master Plan and on water. The next one will be on the Auroville Maintenance system.

But what is the idea behind the Joy of Learning? And how successful has it been? *Auroville Today* talked to members of the organizing team to find out more.

#### ***What was the inspiration for the Joy of Learning programme? How did it begin?***

Mike: Lalit came up with the idea. We had been working on further learning programmes, but he pointed out that nobody was looking at major issues affecting the community and we needed to do something on that line.

Min: During a meeting with the Governing Board and International Advisory Council we shared with them what we wanted to do in terms of developing further education. And they told us, "You guys want to teach the world but you should be trying to learn some things yourself." It really sank in that we had to do something for our own learning.

The original idea was that we would follow the TED talk format and there would some emphasis upon coming up with solutions. But then we realised that the job of solving problems belongs to the community, so we decided the best approach would be for us to do the information part and, if a community decision needed to be made, the RAS would organize that process.

Alan: The information part is crucial because often in our community decision-making meetings crucial information is missing, so we make decisions based on very partial knowledge. And often when we have to decide upon an issue, it's an emergency situation and people tend to be very reactive or want to force through their opinion. So we decided to try to lay the informational groundwork on important topics in a more relaxed space where people could absorb information without having to immediately act on it.

Mike: As soon as we had the first potential presenters around the table, they started expressing their perspectives and opinions:



*Joy of Learning organizing team: From left, Alan, Mike, Min, and Lalit*

it felt a bit like a General Meeting. And I think we all realised that this was not the way we wanted to go; that we wanted to focus on facts to raise awareness rather than on pushing personal agendas and opinions.

Alan: The process is fascinating. Whenever we start a new topic, the resource people come with their personal perspectives, which may be very different. But then, just by sitting round a table and listening to others, something changes in them.

Mike: For me, this is the best part. We ask them, what do you really want to tell the community? What do you think the community needs to know in order to understand your work better? That's where the shift happens.

Alan: Also, when resource people understand that others not only have a huge amount of knowledge too, but are very dedicated I think it helps dissolve the differences. Then they start listening to each other and building upon each other's insights.

Min: It's a process of collective co-creation.

Alan: The whole training part is also fascinating. We help the presenters pull out the essence of what they want to say. I think that because of this, the general level of the presentations has been high.

Mike: We always want to ensure the best presentations, but this takes time and energy. When we started, we thought we could do one session a month but we soon realised this would be impossible, simply because the process of getting the right people together developing a common understanding of what we are trying to accomplish and jointly creating a coherent synthesis of all contributions is very time-consuming.

#### ***How are the topics chosen?***

Mike: The topics would emerge from something that was around, like issues that were already being thought about or worked on by the Residents Assembly Service or a major working group.



### ***Why is it called the 'joy of learning'?***

Min: It is about finding ways to learn in a more joyful, entertaining manner. To achieve this, we have tried varying the format from the usual lecture type presentations. We made a farm visit, for example, which was very successful, and we also talked about doing a session at the Visitors Centre where we would combine humorous skits, a talk show, music etc.

Alan: I think we've been less successful then we set out to be. We have fallen back into the old mode of PowerPoint presentations which, I think, address only one level of understanding or area of the brain. This probably reflects the way that we, the organizers, learn but it may not appeal to those who absorb their information in other ways.

Mike: Learning for me is always a joy! But I agree that we can be a little bit more playful.

I think part of the problem is that a lot of the material we are dealing with is academic in nature, so it is a challenge to translate it into something else without losing important information. Maybe we should consider always running two sessions on an issue, where the background information is given in the first session and then there is a more experiential follow-up, just as we did with farming.

### ***Is there any way to assess the impact of these sessions?***

Min: Immediately after the presentations, many people have come up to us and said this was very useful.

Mike: Some of the experts are missing more of the in-depth information but, overall, the feedback has been quite positive. And if you measure success in terms of the numbers of people who have attended, we have not done badly. Over ninety people attended the last session on farming.

Clearly, what we had been doing in these sessions was appreciated by some people because we were asked to use a similar approach to gather information from the community in preparation for the Auroville Retreat.

Min: For me, the most interesting change has been in how people react in the question and answer session after the presentations. In the beginning, we would have people expressing strong opinions and this would quickly turn into a debate, but now generally people ask questions for clarification; and those questions and answers energise the session rather than dampening it. People behave differently now because they have realised we're not trying to make people decide on things but that we are trying to expand knowledge about an issue.

Mike: It would be great if we could translate what happens in the small preparation meetings, where the learning is really happening, on a larger scale, but as yet I don't know how.

***Do you feel that the Joy of Learning approach is part of a larger movement in Auroville, a shift away from the old adversarial approach to issues to one of cooperation and discovery?***

Min: I think that culture of communication and collaboration is developing. For example, Slava who helped us with the Retreat saw what we were doing and now he has become one of the key people in the Residents Assembly Service, taking responsibility for collecting and disseminating information.

Alan: I sense the Joy of Learning approach may be part of a wider movement in the community. The Residents Assembly Service ensure there is a much bigger information component in our General Meetings now, the three day selection process for members of major groups builds upon the collective wisdom of the participants, and other groups are working independently on improving meeting process with the intention of coming together in more respectful, collaborative ways. It's subtle, it's not easy to quantify, but I think some important shift is happening.

### ***Have you been changed through this process, have you learned things?***

Min: I have learned a different way of working in terms of exchanging points of view and working together in a harmonious way. That's why I look forward to the sessions: they energise me.

Mike: The common thread that runs through all the presentations is the famous 'human factor'. In other words, the solutions always seem to involve us. We, I, have to be ready to change to make possible the larger changes.

Two things have happened for me. Seeing the amazing work some of these people have done over such a long time and how much knowledge they have acquired has brought me a new level of trust in our human resources.

The second one relates to the amount of information that is out there. We have to make a selection for the presentations, yet if we look at the number of studies that have been done on topics like mobility, water and farming, it is quite amazing. For every topic, I have learned a lot.

Alan: For me, what came through more than anything was the dedication and enthusiasm of the presenters. You may forget some of the information they have given but you don't forget the way they are giving it, the dedication and love for what they are doing.

Min: I remember the closing slide of Deoyani's presentation on soil. She brought it to another dimension by connecting together the various aspects of water and soil by reference to the attributes of the goddess Sri Lakshmi. I was very moved by this.

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

And, finally, a word of advice: be more concerned with your own faults than with those of others. If each one worked seriously at his own self-perfection, the perfection of the whole would follow automatically. (The Mother, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 200)





## Salon

### “To sweep God’s temple-floors...”

by Angelo Salerno

*515. There are two works that are perfectly pleasing to God in his servant; to sweep in silent adoration His temple-floors and to fight in the world's battlefield for His divine consummation in humanity. (Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Aphorisms)*

It is easy to see that God would be perfectly pleased by those who fight for His victory and the realization of the Divine Truth in the battlefield of the world, and who exert themselves in His service with great energy and sacrifice and faithful dedication. Easy to see because it is an outward service, visible in some manner to the outward eye, either in the midst of its action or in its end and result. There are none who would argue with the valor of the warrior who sacrifices himself in battle for an outward victory, or with the man of action, who devotes himself with the same spirit of energy and self-sacrifice for the furtherance of the Divine’s purpose on Earth.

Less easy to comprehend is the Divine pleasure and perfect acceptance of the service of His devotees who are engaged in the sweeping of His temple-floors. We live in an entirely utilitarian age and someone who spends all his time in adoration and floor-sweeping in a temple is apt to be looked at askance by the general population, for he would seem to be wasting his time in unproductive service to the world. It would be typical of the modern mind to criticize him and accuse him of indolence and selfishness. And even if it would be admitted that a person has the right to pursue that which gives him pleasure, at least if it does not come at anyone else’s expense, it would still seem highly suspect that such a person should be counted among God’s servants, or that they should even be counted as perfect equals, among servants, with the heroes.

But when the thought expressed is plumbed deeper and one approaches its foundation, it will be seen that the service rendered by such a one is just as useful and necessary to God’s work as the heroes’. We have to go deeper into what Sri Aurobindo means to say, regarding these ‘floor sweepers’, and for this we have to leave behind the outer sense and take the inner. It is not to be taken in the sense of occupational priests and monks and ashramites and the literal maintenance of temples and shrines which wins the Divine favor. The outer image is only a symbol of something more inner and more true. In this inner symbolic sense, God’s temple is rightly placed in the inner human heart and mind, and the outer temple is only its material form. It is the place consecrated and set aside from the outer and secular world, wherein His presence is installed and tended, as in the manner of a sacred Flame. The worship and adoration conducted there is the offering of the human aspiration to That which is All-love and All-light and source

of all Truth, Justice, Beauty and Perfection. It is those who are engaged thus in the inner temple of the heart, keeping it tended and clean and striving in adoration after Divinity, whom Sri Aurobindo means here when he speaks of those who ‘sweep in silent adoration His temple-floors’.

It is paramount if the world is to progress that this flame of true spirituality should be constantly tended and refreshed and renewed. Should this flame of the Divine presence and the human aspiration ever sink and the altar grow dim and the floors be covered in dust from disuse in the heart and temple of the race, then the victory of darkness and decay would be nigh at hand and civilization would be approaching near to its end. The Ideal has to be always kept in front, as the purohita of the ancient sacrifice, burning against the darkness of the Night, and the spiritual realizations of the ancient sages and seers be constantly renewed in new hearts and new minds as fresh dawns proceeding in unbroken sequence from the ancient past towards an ever-brighter Future.

It is these men and women who have tended this inner aspiration over the ages, and constantly sought to renew in themselves the highest truths and realizations of the spirit, keeping them fresh and free of dust, who are counted truly as God’s perfect servants and equals to the heroes. Though it is an inner work and mostly invisible to the outer eye, it is of equal necessity and importance to the furtherance of the Divine effort in the world, and such persons who have devoted themselves in all sincerity to the task should be counted as no less.

\* \* \* \* \*

The religious forms which persist today seem, more or less, to be ill-kept temples built in previous times. Perhaps some fire burns there in the inner sanctum, but men have been content on the whole to let them accumulate a thickness of dust and God’s image be mostly overgrown by the reclamation of Nature. For mankind on the whole has not taken the message of the Great Ones to heart nor sought in themselves to nurture the inner flame or to take up the pilgrim’s staff and tread the difficult way of Righteousness and Wisdom. The living wisdom and teaching of the sages have been turned into dogmas, or twisted into falsehoods, and the key to their writings and speech has been long lost. Outer traditions and rules and regulations are their ossified remains. Whatever life is left there is due to the few ‘temple sweepers’ who gave themselves to the task, and were it not for them, all would be dark. Even so, much remains dark and the temple of Divinity in mankind is in much need of repair.

There is a call today, just as in all the days past, for some to take up the broom and sweep the temple clean, to offer fresh fuel to the fire, and the altar again be brought back to life in self-giving to the Highest. The Truth contained in the old forms and teachings of the past should be renewed and given new birth in new forms and new words, and the Essence recovered and saved from its covering shell. The windows thrown open that fresh life





can breathe within and the highest Light enter in to illumine its halls. Let some hearts again, on behalf of the race, be filled with aspiration and adoration and consecration and humility and an unsparing dedication to the discovery of the Truth. Whether their work be visible or invisible is of no matter, and as for the results, they are left to God.

One day it shall be that the fires grow so strong that they grow into a Sun and escape the temple walls in an outburst and glory of light. Until then, the work must go on, of heroes and of devotees.

## Spiritual practicality: The need of the moment

by Beloo Mehra

*This article was first published on the author's blog, "Beauty Interprets, Expresses, Manifests the Eternal," at <https://beautyishisfootprint.wordpress.com/>*

It seems pretty much every month there is some big international conference going on somewhere, discussing Climate Change, Solar Energy, Global Terrorism and all such important issues of the day. Political leaders, subject experts, public intellectuals, journalists, pretty much everyone who reads the newspaper and watches news on TV or follows it on social media has an opinion on these matters.

No, this essay isn't about one more opinion on any of these topics. It is actually about something quite contrary. It is about the inadequacy and the insufficiency of the mental ideas and opinions.

Sri Aurobindo in his essay, *The Conservative Mind and Eastern Progress* uses a phrase "spiritual practicality" which is actually the focus of this article. This phrase could present a challenge to the general notion or understanding many people have of the term "spirituality." Most people are somehow used to thinking that spirituality and practicality can't go hand in hand. This perhaps comes from the faulty notion of seeing "spiritual-type" people as "impractical, other-worldly or out-of-touch-with-the-real-big-bad-world-out-there types."

But the truth is quite something else. One just has to give a quick look (without any preconceived notions) at the thousands of years of history of India and one will learn about the immense contributions of rishis, munis, yogis, sadhaks, gurus in practically all aspects of human life and activity. Philosophy, psychology, ethics, sociology, mathematics, astronomy, science, medicine, literature, arts, politics, warfare—every field of what we consider as "practical" human activity has been the field of work of our rishis and yogis.

(Of course, one wouldn't find this in the Marxist school of Indian history which is generally being taught in our Indian educational programmes. One will need to do one's own un-learning of the old ideological view of history and then begin a process of re-learning of this deeper and inner history of India.)

But the other day as I reflected more on the term "spiritual practicality" as used by Sri Aurobindo in his essay, I wasn't thinking of history. I was thinking of the present.

Global Poverty vs. Mindless Consumerism, Ecological Destruction vs. Economic Development, Terrorist Violence vs. World Peace, Religious Wars vs. Respectful Pluralism. Not a single day passes when we don't hear or read something or the other about one or more of these harsh conflicts facing the humanity and the world. It seems that such conflicts represent the state of things right now in the world.

In their own ways peoples, societies, and nations have been trying to address these conflicts in different ways. By enacting reasonable laws, by formulating thoughtful policies, by creating organised institutions, and by promoting all the 'right' secular values such as equality, liberty, human rights, universal education and at the same time lending their weight to the nobler ideals such as compassion for all life and nature, peace, non-violence etc.

And yet nothing seems to be working.  
What is missing?

The present era of the world is a stage of immense transformations. Not one but many radical ideas are at work in the mind of humanity and agitate its life with a vehement seeking and effort at change..... No nation or community can any longer remain psychologically cloistered and apart in the unity of the modern world. It may even be said that the future of humanity depends most upon the answer that will be given to the modern riddle of the Sphinx by the East and especially by India, the hoary guardian of the Asiatic idea and its profound spiritual secrets. *For the most vital issue of the age is whether the future progress of humanity is to be governed by the modern economic and materialistic mind of the West or by a nobler pragmatism guided, uplifted and enlightened by spiritual culture and knowledge.* The West never really succeeded in spiritualising itself and latterly it has been habituated almost exclusively to an action in the external governed by political and economic ideals and necessities; in spite of the reawakening of the religious mind and the growth of a widespread but not yet profound or luminous spiritual and psychical curiosity and seeking, it has to act solely in the things of this world and to solve its problems by mechanical methods and as the thinking political and economic animal, simply because it knows no other standpoint and is accustomed to no other method. On the other hand the East, though it has allowed its spirituality to slumber too much in dead forms, has always been open to profound awakenings and preserves its spiritual capacity intact, even when it is actually inert and uncreative. *Therefore the hope of the world lies in the re-arousing in the East of the old spiritual practicality and large and profound vision and power of organisation under the insistent contact of the West and in the flooding out of the light of Asia on the Occident, no longer*



in forms that are now static, effete, unadaptive, but in new forms stirred, dynamic and effective.” (Sri Aurobindo, *CWSA, Vol. 13*, pp. 137-138, emphasis added)

What is missing is “spiritual practicality,” which when combined with a “large and profound vision” and a “power of organisation” can help humanity come out of the conflicts it has created in its path to progress.

What kind of “large and profound vision” do we need as an ideal? Perhaps the ideal of a true human unity?

But it can not be a mentalised ideal of unity which is unable to handle diversity without imposing a certain mental idea of uniformity. What is needed is a truer, an inner unity that doesn’t impose uniformity, but also doesn’t tolerate abuse and disrespect of all that is different and unknown. What is needed is a deeper unity that doesn’t eradicate diversity but also doesn’t allow inhumanity and mindless violence (not only physical) to trample over all that is good, beautiful, true and humane.

Such unity doesn’t come easily. Such unity doesn’t come simply by wishing. Or simply by being politically correct. It requires sincere honesty. Of intention, of action, of rising above the pettiness and the lowest tendencies of greed, power struggle and domination. Serious work, strategic work is required. On all fronts—national, international, political, economic, social, cultural, educational.

And most importantly, on spiritual.

What is needed is a sincere effort to recover that “spiritual practicality” of the olden times and make it relevant for today and tomorrow. A spiritual practicality that helps us—individuals and societies—become more conscious of all our movements, all our actions, decisions and choices.

On an individual level, it could be something as basic as making food choices that are least harmful for the environment or becoming conscious consumers in order to keep reducing our carbon foot-print. Or it could be at the level of socially-politically active individuals organising together to work toward a greater civilisational and cultural renaissance.

At all levels what is required is an inner approach to outward action. Only a deeper, inward turning to the higher truth (of the self, not of the ego) and a disinterested action (in the sense of unegoistic, unselfish, having no regard for the result, with no preference for any particular outcome) can become the basis of a true spiritual practicality. Mentalised ideals can only take us so far, because mental ideals are easily broken at the first attack from life’s complexities and circumstances.

What is really required is to rise in consciousness so that as individuals, societies and nations all our actions and decisions are more and more guided by unitarian, integrative and harmonizing tendencies instead of separative, divisive, egoistic tendencies.

Unfortunately, for many people being ‘open-minded’ and ‘modern’ has come to mean accepting pretty much every lifestyle choice as an equally valid choice, in the name of freedom. Being ‘liberal’ has come to mean defending or being apologetic of the

worst kind of violence and terror against humanity. All in the name of becoming the voice for the “all beliefs are equal” type of post-modernistic relativism.

This supposed ‘value-neutrality’ is against the most essential tenet of any spiritual path which emphasises the development of a clear sense of discernment, viveka — defined by Sri Aurobindo as “intuitive and inspired judgment gained by a previous purification of the organs of thought and knowledge” (*CWSA, Vol. 1*, p. 501). It is an ability to sincerely and honestly distinguish between right and wrong, between good and not-good, between dharma and a-dharma. This applies equally to individuals in their individual sphere of life as well as to the societies and nations in collective life.

It is also equally important to recognise that spirituality doesn’t have to be religion-based, it can just as easily be an a-religious quest. The most sincere seekers on any spiritual path are in fact most open-minded and accepting of the diversity of wisdom traditions emerging from within various civilizations and cultures. They recognize that while each religion has a spiritual component but practical spirituality or spiritual practicality doesn’t require or necessitate any fixed adherence to any outer forms of any religion. They recognize and respect the truth that for some seekers a religion’s outer forms such as rituals, ceremonies, etc. are important aids on the path. But equally so, this may not be the case for many others.

Such equal acceptance of difference is part of the inner make-up of sincere seekers on the path of truth. They recognize that what binds all these diverse seekers is a common search for the higher truth, an inner seeking whose practice is generally as individualised as something can be. Only such an experience has the potential to help one inwardly realize the deeper truth of values such as freedom, equality, and unity, beyond all intellectualising and rationalising of such ideals.

What is needed is a waking up to the life-affirming nature of Indian spirituality. Not religiosity, mind you. But a deep, personal seeking, an intense inner and outer search for the truth, the right, the good and the beautiful.

It is more important that the thought of India should come out of the philosophical school and renew its contact with life, and the spiritual life of India issue out of the cave and the temple and, adapting itself to new forms, lay its hand upon the world. I believe also that humanity is about to enlarge its scope by new knowledge, new powers and capacities, which will create as great a revolution in human life as the physical science of the nineteenth century. Here, too, India holds in her past, a little rusted and put out of use, the key of humanity’s future.” (Extract from an interview given to a correspondent of *The Hindu*, quoted in Rishabhchand, *Sri Aurobindo—His Life Unique*, p. 410)

Are we ready for the challenge to re-discover that key to the future? Ours and our world’s?



## Sri Aurobindo and J.S. Bach —a personal experience

by Zackaria Moursi

More than half a century ago, I left Egypt, at the age of twenty-one, to pursue graduate studies in Germany. The memoirs of how Europe impacted me I have included in an autobiographical short story titled “Preparing for the Winter Journey.”<sup>1</sup> Today, I reuse a small part of these memoirs as a backdrop for the following experience.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after my arrival in Germany, while leisurely turning the dial of my radio, I discovered Western classical music. Immediately a whole new world opened for me. Music soon became the haven in which I took shelter at the end of days filled with technical and mental work. As a student, I had the good fortune of renting a room in an apartment owned by a lady of some culture, who encouraged me to buy a piano and allowed me to place it and practice in her living room. She introduced me to a pianist of some renown who agreed to teach me from scratch. He did not believe in the efficacy of finger exercises, and started me immediately on the C-major Two-part Invention of Bach. This short invention, my first piece ever, I practiced for hours every day over seven months without ever tiring of it. It was the beginning of an “addiction” to Bach whose music had triggered a first psychic opening in me.

At about the same time, I came across the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (the story of how these writings have impacted me I have published under the title “The Encounter.”<sup>3</sup>) I was extremely mentally lopsided in those days and, for a long time, I had to inch my way patiently and laboriously into the world of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother until they ultimately became the center and the circumference of my life. Amazingly, my entry in the world of music happened, in contrast, almost instantly, though I cannot claim any inborn musical talents..

Since these early days, half a century ago, to this day, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been my “staff of life,” while Bach has remained my main emotional-vital support. Strangely, during all this time, I took this happy arrangement for granted and was not aware of any special link between these great masters filling my life. Recently, one such link dawned on me through a remark made by the French philosopher G. Deleuze in a talk he gave in 1978 titled “What is the Creative Act?”<sup>4</sup> Following are some excerpts from this talk:

...there is a fundamental affinity between a work of art and an act of resistance... What is this mysterious relationship between a work of art and an act of resistance when the men and women who resist have neither the time nor sometimes even the culture necessary to have the slightest connection with art? I do not know. Malraux<sup>5</sup> developed an admirable philosophical concept. He said something very simple about art. He said it was the only thing that resists death. Think about it... what resists death? You only have to look at a statu-

ette from three thousand years before the Common Era to see that Malraux’s statement is a pretty good one. Bach’s music is an act of resistance, an active struggle against the separation of the profane and the sacred...

For Deleuze, art plays the same role Yoga plays for Sri Aurobindo. Both art and yoga resist the paralysis of the soul under the weight of unconsciousness. Deleuze’s call ties well with the one Sri Aurobindo sounded 60 years earlier: “... the soul, the inner being, its powers, its possibilities, its growth, its expression and the creation of a true, beautiful and helpful environment for it as the one thing of first and last importance.”<sup>6</sup> The unification of the Sacred and the Profane is the cornerstone of the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who always maintained that “All Life is Yoga” and who dedicated their lives towards establishing the Life Divine on earth.

While listening to Bach’s cantatas and passions, I often wondered how, in scenes describing Christ’s sufferings, his music can be so full of an infinitely tender sorrow and, at the same time, of a sublimely divine joy. In fact, some of his movements are so joyous as to qualify as an invitation to dance (for instance, the ‘cum spiritus sanctu’ of the B-minor mass<sup>7</sup>). Instead of lamenting, Bach celebrates Christ’s consummation of his mission in much the same way as Sri Aurobindo does in the following lines from his epic *Savitri*:

It is finished, the dread mysterious sacrifice,  
Offered by God’s martyred body for the world; ....  
He has trod with bleeding brow the Saviour’s way.  
He who has found his identity with God  
Pays with the body’s death his soul’s vast light.<sup>8</sup>

In her last years, the Mother spoke increasingly of vibrations tying the whole universe together. One can only marvel at how a common divine vibration acted across space and time and moved the Avatars of the Supermind Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and “the immortal god of harmony,”<sup>9</sup> Bach, to elevate life and resist death with such irresistible power and mastery—thus helping humanity on its way to the Life Divine.

1. <http://www.sriarobindo-inarabic.com/en-originals/preparing-winter-journey.pdf>
2. My sincere thanks to John Robert Cornell for his gracious editing of this article.
3. <http://www.sriarobindo-inarabic.com/en-originals/en-encounter.pdf>
4. Gilles Deleuze: What is the Creative Act? [http://youtu.be/a\\_hifamdISS](http://youtu.be/a_hifamdISS)
5. André Malraux: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A9\\_Malraux](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A9_Malraux)
6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 248.
7. Bach, B minor mass: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7F7TVM8m95Y>
8. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 445.
- 9). According to Beethoven’s homage to Bach.





## Chronicles

### A visit to India

by David Hutchinson

*In January/February of 2016, David Hutchinson spent several weeks visiting Puducherry, Thanjavur, and Auroville. These notes are from his travel journal. Portions were also published in the March 2016 issue of Auroville Today and are reprinted here with permission.*

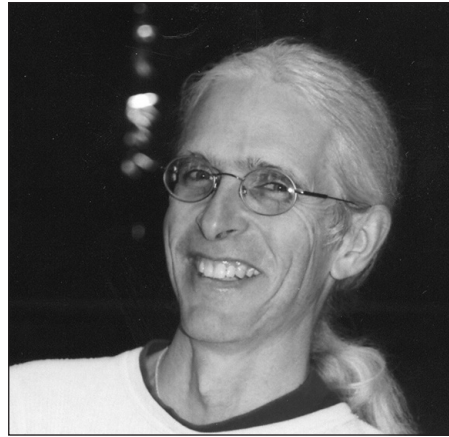
#### Landing in Puducherry

My traveling companion Dian and I are lounging at a shady outdoor table in a colonial niche at Hotel L'Orient, a few minutes' walk from our guest houses, where the constant beep-beepbeep of scooters, taxis, and everything else is practically inaudible. Our friend Kamal, an invisible gift-bringing angel, is about; we return to our rooms and find that a cloth bag full of oranges or bananas have magically appeared.

The drive down from Chennai was intense and fascinating; even if that were the whole of this trip, there would be enough to fill a book. Traffic in India deserves an essay of its own with the endless variety of trucks, many painted in a swirling variety of colors and patterns worthy of Burning Man. Every so often we passed inches by a bus (one doesn't hang an arm out of a taxi here), full of passengers gazing ahead, all the windows open, thinking of ... what? What goes through their heads in looking out from open windows on this cacophony?

Chennai seemed to be tearing itself down and rebuilding at the same time, four-storey structures with only concrete, others with a single room open to the elements.

The exhaust wasn't as bad as expected, nor the honking. India feels like home to me, strangely, in a way that I can't explain—Pondy is the opposite of pristine Singapore or Switzerland: piles of bricks lurking in every street, rules made to be broken, every street a bazaar. It's organic, complex, chaotic, every individual filling

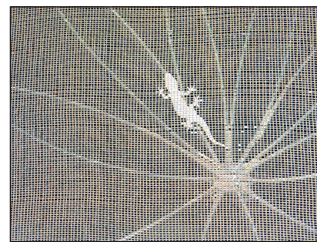


a niche, be it the ten-year-old in the family tea-wallah stall or the ninety-year-old sweeping dust from the front stoop in the early morning twilight.

Yesterday the wind and surf rose, and dozens of locals came out to walk the beach, some few standing on the broken black cubes of the beachfront to get splashed and selfied.

The center, for some of us, is the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, more specifically the Samadhi where I found myself yesterday afternoon after braving the humid heat of midday. There you park your shoes across the street, are admonished about photographs and phones, then file in slowly until reaching the inner courtyard. Of that each person has to speak individually; there are as many stories as there are visitors. I saw children imitating devotional gestures and postures of their parents while clearly antsy to be elsewhere, and many others in deep meditation. Every week at home we wrestle and ponder and laugh through the standard books of Integral Yoga; here in the Ashram you grapple with the thing itself, look deeply into your soul, ask important questions, reach out to the unknown.

When I first arrived in my spartan room last night, a sudden movement caught my eye—a tiny gecko not much more than an inch long scampered behind the photo of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother before I could even open a conversation. Whether she came out later while I was sleeping and looked down on me, who knows?



Evening visitor (Photo by David Hutchinson)

#### Trust the universe

My room at Park Guest House is named Trust. Every time I read the plaque, a bell goes off in my mind. Trust the universe has been my long-term non-Sanskrit non-religious mantra expressing one of the highest principles in this yoga: have faith in God and Shakti. Everything else is optional, but a core faith in the universe drives Integral Yoga forward.

Since the main purpose of our visit is coming to the birthplace of this yoga, perhaps I should spend a little time writing about it. What is Integral Yoga? Here where it was incubated and grew into maturity it seems only proper to take a shot at the question.

A few negatives might help by clearing the field. Integral Yoga isn't the conspicuous display of photographs, "Auro" words (half of the businesses have this in their title), hands-folded namaskars (very hygienic way to greet someone, however!), incense, adoration of icons. It isn't a global intellectual mastery of terms, hierarchies, concepts, the ability to give a three-hour disquisition to a rapt audience. It isn't strange Eastern beliefs in opposition to Western life, culture, values. It isn't following rules of any sort, whether diet, dress, personal behavior. It isn't living in an ashram. It isn't professing fealty to the human persons of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

All of the above can be found here; several are almost universal. They're not the same as yoga.

In the West if one says, "I practice yoga," the immediate response will be, "Where do you take classes?" Yoga is understood to be physical postures. For Integral Yoga, physical postures and breathing exercises (hatha yoga) are optional—as are mental practices (raja yoga), a command of the mind and senses. Don't get me wrong. Taking care of the

body, sharpening and stocking the mind are all to the good. Like brushing your teeth in the morning and tying your shoes,



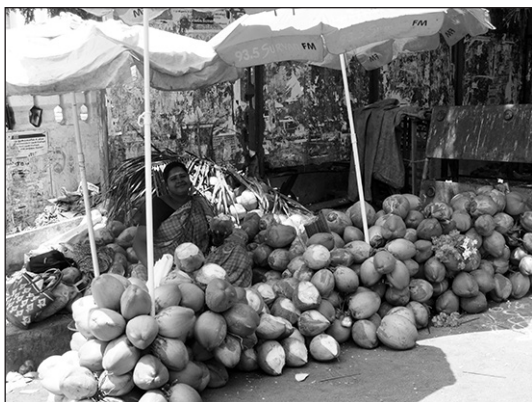
they get you started on the right foot. Or at least keep you from stumbling on your shoelaces!

So, what's left, you ask?

Everything.

This yoga paints an astounding picture: a vast dynamic inner consciousness of multiple types and levels, including the (currently non-conscious) rock-hard inertia of physical matter; a bright individual soul growing with every experience, capable of guiding one's every move, thought, emotion, carried from life to life—itsself connected to a divine spark within; levels of consciousness above the human mind, where there is the play of intuition and spiritual insight, clear forcefulness, a cosmic awareness, all of which can descend into our current makeup and begin a process of transformation; and beyond that a radical Otherness dubbed the supermind or supramental, a level of consciousness that proceeds by identity with things from the inside out, an infallible unity and harmony and effectiveness surpassing all areas of the self that allows for individuality right alongside that unity, and is capable of completing the transformation of our entire being right down to our toenails.

That's just the static mile-high view. At every stage of experience, work, and accomplishment there are details, tools, successes and failures. Yoga is consciousness—its qualities, ranges, exploration, development. Not a one-time enlightenment, nor a single experience. Even with the summit of the supermind it involves ongoing discovery, individual difference, progress.



Coconut vendor across from the Ashram Dining Hall offers Nature's refreshments. (Photo by Larry Seidlitz)

There is one central injunction in this yoga, returned to again and again in the tens of thousands of pages by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: go within. We can brush our teeth only so long before stepping out the door. Or in this case, stepping in the door: the one essential process is to reverse our evolutionary mentality, look inward, break the seal of the default surface awareness, begin to make connections with the soul and the higher consciousness.

And trust. More often this is called surrender: we make contact with our inner being, a spiritual part of ourselves, even in small or tentative measure, give ourselves to that soul and higher spirit. Because after that still small voice begins to peep from the heart, after true intuitions begin to enlighten the mind and senses—the best way to forge ahead is to follow those voices and lights.

This soul and spirit are more than disembodied voices: they are part and parcel of the large totality that we are, individually and collectively, and they possess better tools to rework our raw material. What we can do in a year the higher consciousness can do in a minute. In his journal *The Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo relates a transition when suddenly he could remember things permanently after only a glance that before might slip away no matter how much he studied.

We want a simple road map, a guidepost pointing the way, but the inner part of our self is as complex as our biology. It would be laughable if someone offered to teach you microbiology with a single maxim. Even more so with yoga, which layers a deep complexity onto the world we are already familiar with. Anyone who has actually done yoga will relate the staggering complexity of this endeavor, this change. It's not enough to gaze at the astounding mountain and sigh, appreciating its grandeur. We need to hike through the scrub, get chewed up by thorn bushes, fall in a creek, get lost and



Visitors to the Ashram Post Office enjoy a fresh coconut water drink. (Photo by Larry Seidlitz)

hungry, double back on the trail, learn new ways of walking, shed some equipment that was useful lower down but is now just holding us back, stop to rest and breathe.

Practical exploration. Testing, trying, learning. Building new muscles.

Yoga is practical because consciousness is a kind of stuff, not an idea. We get fooled by the wonders of the mind and intellect, that thing which can roam the universe in concept while sitting in an armchair. The mind is a great tool, but in comparison to the physical world it feels like ... less than nothing. Nobody can cook a meal or build a chair with their mind. Consciousness feels like an airy wisp compared with the things that dominate our life.

Such a perspective is right, in a way. Mind-stuff is mostly impotent in the face of chairs and carrots. But go within and go upward, and consciousness is experienced in a different light. It gets more dense, more capable of dealing with the physical.

So trust: the universe, your inspirations and intuitions, the direction of your life, the direction of the humankind, your experiences; trust the journey, even if it requires walking a thousand miles; trust the universe.

### Chipmunks whispering

Back in the day (my day, that is, the 1970s) very few people were familiar with a genuine ashram or the denizens thereof. What they imagined:



“... he had made a pilgrimage to the Assassin Shrine in Albania, where he’d fasted, inhaled vapors, and gone nine days without sleep. And then he’d stared into an ornately carved Seeing Hole in the floor of the Shrine, and he’d seen a vision of things to come ... Death and destruction, engines of destruction, whole cities crumbling ... And at the last, a war between magic and science that would leave the world in ashes.”

Okay, this scene from Charlie Jane Anders’ novel *All the Birds in the Sky* is a touch extreme, but it’s still difficult to explain what one does at an ashram. Heck, I can’t get a straight answer from people who’ve been here for half a century.

Ashram life varies as much as family life. Having lived in one and visited several of different stripes, I can say with assurance that you will see recalcitrant teenagers, doddering nonagenarians, fanatics, skeptics, prayers, bench science, organic gardens, diapers, smart phones, filmis, prayers, griping, sniping, bench science, and paperwork. Like an extended, confused, hopeful, helpful, and occasionally irritating family.

What’s impossible to see are the inner lives of those elders, youngsters, and in-betweeners. There’s the rub. Arjuna famously posed the question two thousand years ago to his blue-skinned friend. To paraphrase, “What does a person with a top-notch genuine inner life look like?”

It’s the sound of one hand clapping, the finger and the moon, the whisper of chipmunks. Just too damn hard to nail down. There is no answer. The question is the answer. The hunger is the food. Making sense yet?

“But that’s dodging the question!” you say, stomping your foot. Quite right. “You know it when you see it” is a terrible excuse for an explanation. Doesn’t matter whether the thing is femto-matter or spiritual reality. Dig in with a few metaphors and have at it. Never rains but it pours.

Sitting in my room today on an enforced time-out as my microbiome adjusts to the sub-continent, with plenty of space to gaze into my inner chambers, these questions roll away with the surf.

When I was seven years old I had what was advertised as a skiing lesson, after which, if memory serves, the instructor took us up to the top of a thousand-foot precipice and pushed us off. Everything is that way. A few lessons, do one teach one, and the race is on. Yoga is no exception. Books are great, necessary, important. But it only happens when you jump off the cliff.

In the beginning of *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo talks about teachers. His answer to Arjuna’s question is, in typical blue-tinted style, straightforward and eminently reasonable. Spiritual teachers (and maybe ski instructors) have an effect in three ways. The least is what they say; a little more helpful is their demonstration; the most effective is what they are.

The same goes for all of us.

Have you ever noticed that each person carries an aura? Not the shiny type favored by Theosophists—more like an atmosphere. Just like the atmosphere, actually. Something that you suddenly find yourself in: clear or foggy, stormy, multi-colored, golden snow falling all around ...

Back in the seventies when pithy maxims were all the rage, the saying went, “No matter where you go, there you are.” (Often said by the irritating one in the family). Turns out they were right! (But didn’t know why, so we can still feel smugly irritated).

Because everything is connected—not just in an airy-fairy sense of universal oneness, but on all the vastly interconnecting parts of our inner and outer being. Want to share your anger? Don’t worry—you already have. Achieved a true sense of peace, wideness, ananda? It’s already touching those around you.

So be careful what kind of acorns you squirrel away. In this billion-fold ashram of humankind, we all live in glass houses.

## On the rails

Greetings from car A1, seat 37, train 16861 from Puducherry to Thanjavur! After being escorted here by my friends Dian and Theresa (and a local dog), scratching our heads at the long lists

of trains and destinations, I said a fond goodbye, walked out on the track, asked a considerate official the location of my car—not totally necessary, if one reads the ticket closely, because the cars are in fact labeled (e.g. “S2” for second class, non-air-conditioned, “Sleeper,” or in my case “A1 2AC”), two people per compartment, maybe, though there are four bunks in the compartment, so we shall see.

All the amenities of home, and then some: a jute string bag over each side of the window for water bottle; laptop/mobile charging; fan (it works—but one speed, and a ferocious speed at that); pretty blue curtains over the window; and even a small nanny goat inspecting the track below our carriage ...

So the vast subcontinent lays before me, or at least 140 kilometers of it. Contrary to a description in one guidebook, the windows are not tinted dark at all, so there should be an excellent view of the countryside. Farms, tanks, rivers, villages?

Am sorry to leave behind the beautiful line drawings at the base of the stairs at Park Guest House. The same housekeeper who manages my fourth floor room was creating one this morning. First she brushed and wetted the surface, then made the drawing in chalk. Today’s was a leaf design, a dozen pointed ovals branching from a center point. The simplicity and creativity of these chalk drawings is endearing—reminds me of the year that I set up a playground for children at a co-op preschool every day. The materials were few: a couple of tires, a few balance beams, some stepping stools. So each day was an exercise in creating a new design from limited materials—the essence of art.

Along the top of my ticket it says “Shubha Yatra—Happy Journey.”

## The Great Temple

The Brhadishvara requires a measured pace, a wide view, a quietness. Doesn’t open its secrets immediately; the first impression is overwhelming grandeur and a massive fortress, befitting the king of kings Rajaraja who built it a thousand years ago. On second glance intricate geometrical





patterns meet the eye, layer upon layer, rising, receding, wrought in thousand-year-old red granite blocks covered with hundreds of figures, titanic to tiny, in every niche and doorway.

What of these entities who live and breathe at the Great Temple, dance and grimace, bless and wave? They demand attention: you can not, should not pass through the portals without giving them their due.

The temple is laid out with geometrical precision in three dimensions, to mirror and manifest Mount Meru, the mountain of Shiva, the axis of the world. When it was built a mountain of earth was heaped around it to create a slope for hauling up the massive blocks, and finally the encasing soil was removed to reveal the temple inside. Almost as if the temple were carved from the earth Prthivi herself or emerged as the Matri-mandir does, symbolizing in Auroville the physical manifestation of another realm coming into being out of our own.

The Brhadishvara is a living, working affair; horns and bells sound each hour as priests call to come enter the womb-chamber, where the deity sleeps, the un-manifest linga, and pilgrims come to wake it and gaze into the open eyes of God.

I came here to meet the gods, these beings whom I have known for decades, Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Devi, to look beneath the surface and know them personally, intimately. Not an easy task; even within our own selves, where we own the form, have lived within it, can feel its moods and thoughts—even in this familiar bodily temple looking beneath the surface is the singular challenge of spiritual work and can take a lifetime to succeed.

My friends do speak to me. Stand-



Gateway to Brhadishvara. (Photo by David Hutchinson)

ing in front of the gargantuan dvarpalas, guardians of each gateway, who smile through their fangs, a sporting kinship rises in my chest. Yes, yes, let us clash swords, crouch and leap, show our teeth, stomp on demons!

Straight ahead standing at his ease on the first level above the plinth is Bhikshitan Shiva, the great God of the snows as simple mendicant, his hand resting gently on a young deer's head. The peace of the forest emanates from him. A fellow-traveler in the cool green of a dense wood, friend to all beings, the light of youth in his eyes.

Sri Aurobindo is right: this art and architecture conveys the unique spiritual essence and gift of India. These human forms hold a power greater than just the representation of the outer, physical body. There is a deliberate absence of detail in face, limbs, body that prevents these beings from having a too-rigid naturalism that would bind us to the surface. Instead, in every face and figure, we are invited to look through the form to the true Person, the being, Bhava.

The specific temple architecture here has an echo of two central spiritual realities described by Integral Yoga.

First, to get to the central sanctuary you pass through a long columned hall, mandapa. (There is an arresting scene in Savitri when she finally breaks through the outer covering and approaches her soul—and in doing so passes through such a hall where the forms of gods gaze at her with the eyes of eternity. They are haunting in their frozen Otherness, all-seeing yet blank, upholders of the world and uncaring, progenitors and apart from time.)

The hallway corresponds to the lateral, inward journey from surface to soul, outer to inner. It is a long one, with many an antechamber to get lost in and distracted by along the way, faces whose calling may or may not be friendly. A journey to be made with the goal held firmly in mind.

The second aspect of the temple that mirrors this yoga is the vimana, the central pyramid rising over the sanctuary. This shows the vertical journey of the soul upward, rising higher and higher to its meeting point with divinity far above.

### Please honk

In the courtyard of the temple this morning a man was talking on his smartphone. "Acha!!" he yelled, his voice carrying across the cool paving stones. Nobody talks on the phone; they yell at top volume. A consequence, perhaps, of the "Please honk" culture stenciled on every truck and taxi, or an epidemic of hearing loss thanks to the car culture that has overtaken urban India.

The country is in a curious state, as the Pulitzer-winning journalist Steve Coll comments in an interview today in the *Hindu Times*. India has changed "not so much [in]



the physical infrastructure as the technological infrastructure.” And, he adds, “the dark side of development is traffic.”

The second morning of my trip I went for a jog along the beach road and then settled in for a tea at the Le Café, looking out on the ocean. A thirty-something fellow sat next to me. “You were at the Samadhi,” he said.

“Where are you from?” I asked.

“Bangalore. Working there for ten years. Grew up in a small village.” He sells IT technology overseas, traveling several times a year to Europe.

“What’s Bangalore like?”

“Terrible,” he replied. “Changed so much the last ten years. Pollution is out of control. Services can’t keep up.” He wanted to get out to somewhere cleaner.

“What’s the solution? NGOs? Better government?”

He pondered, and shook his head, sadly. “India is this giant thing. Change will take time.”

Information technology and English-language services started to lift India’s economy in the nineties, fueling the middle-class and its millions of diesel-spewing scooters. Two-thirds of the population now use smartphones; India is the second largest market in the world for these futuristic devices.

Yet the streets are still swept by poor women with swatch-brooms, and emaciated cows walk the meridian, their rib cages painfully sticking out.

Katherine Boo in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, her gripping and personal account of the Annawadi slum of Mumbai, uses the terms “undercity” and “overcity” to describe two realms separated by status and wealth. That is what exists today; or is it only part of the reality? If we widen our gaze, are there others?

Kevin Kelly, as someone who walked Asia for a decade with little more than a begging bowl and the shirt on his back, sees the teeming cities of the world as a kind of human engine for evolution, endless niches found, adaptation, energy, ingenuity, the complex human/technium growing into its own over-consciousness.

Talking about the difficulty of impos-

ing change from the outside, one person told me of an effort by an NGO to install toilets in a small village in Nepal. Seeing that the women had to walk a long way to the local creek every day, the NGO built a line of modern facilities near the village. Coming back a year later, they found the toilets had been converted to shops—and the women still walked to the creek.

“Why do you walk every day that long distance, rather than use these?” The women replied, “We work all day alone in the fields. Going to the creek is the only time we get to talk with each other.”

### Ninja training

Want to become a ninja? Develop the ability to see 360 degrees, respond to a dozen opponents at the same time? Have lightning-fast reflexes faster than the eye can see, while maintaining a calm steady demeanor?

Spend a month driving on the back roads of India.

New York City, Paris, London—bah. Child’s play. Bots could drive there—they already are. It will be at least ten, twenty years before self-driving cars will creep quivering and whimpering onto India’s roads.

Yesterday we took off right on time from my hotel, headed northeast towards Pondy. We followed route 45C to Kumbakonam, then headed west to Mayiladuthurai on route 22 and 64 before linking up with 45A through Chidambaram and Cuddalore. Straightforward. A drive through the countryside.

Oh really.

After the first fifty or so hair-raising near-misses, once we were almost out of Thanjavur, I commented to my driver Mahesh, “Driving here requires a lot of concentration ...”

“Yes, very stressful,” he said, while dodging a weaving motorcycle by mere inches as a forty-foot bus barreled straight at us on our side of the road.

“Pack a gun” was the advice a



*Swachh-Bharat: Modi’s Clean India initiative is literally sweeping up the streets. (Photo by Larry Seidlitz)*

friend from north India gave me before the trip, when I told him of this excursion a hundred miles to a temple town. He should have said, “Get general anesthesia, and have them wake you when it’s over.”

Harrowing is too mild a word; mind-boggling doesn’t begin to describe it. The only phrase that describes traffic in every corner of the subcontinent is death-defying. Magical. Balletic. Stressful? No, seizure-inducing.

A conservative estimate would be that we had five thousand white-knuckle near-misses over the trip. That only takes the major situations into account when we were passing a two-ton truck, with a bus and a truck coming at us side by side on the narrow country road, a motorcycle or two or three hugging the edge, and all required to adjust speed, position, vector on a millisecond-by-millisecond basis. If you add in the simpler situations—say, a dog wandering into the road ten feet before the



*Motorcyclist shows off his smart-phone to the rickshaw drivers in front of the Ashram. (Photo by Larry Seidlitz)*



taxi needs to dodge a bus, or two cycles passing us side by side in the four feet of empty space between the two lanes of traffic (four feet that only opened up when the drivers saw the cyclists and edged slightly apart)—then the number probably rises to twenty thousand in our leisurely five-hour drive in the countryside.

To think that hundreds of millions of people are engaged in this every day ... a single supercomputer couldn't navigate one mile on these roads. The combined brain-power, pattern recognition, mind-mapping involved could solve any known problem in an hour. Protein folding? Pah. Climate modeling? Give me something hard.

All this on a nice clear day in a reliable automobile, good tires, rested driver, no distractions, no crowds. Dian is fascinated by India's ability to distribute tens of millions of tiffins every day, but that's a simple point-to-point task, like walking a letter down the block and handing it to someone. Driving is more

like dancing on a surfboard in high heels, blindfolded, as sharks fly through the air on all sides and the water breaks and the board is flying straight at another surfer.

Imagine: We are following about one foot behind a heavy-duty Tata truck at forty miles an hour. The taxi is halfway across the meridian, waiting for an opportunity. In front of the truck is a bus, with a space for a bicycle between them. Coming in the other direction are several motorcycles followed by a monster bus. We move into the other lane, the cycles bear down on us. Closer, closer. Just as the taxi clears the Tata truck we nudge into the space in front of it, missing the cycles and the bus by inches.

Imagine: Do all that three times a minute for five hours.

Taking a drive in the countryside here, even as a passenger, is an exercise

in stamina, trust, equanimity. If you fancy yourself a ninja at the top of your game, come give these roads a try.

### Crossing an invisible boundary

Auroville exists outside—of India, time, place. Beyond the gate, a low canopy of trees springs up abruptly; you pass through an invisible boundary; a step, and all is green and red.

As we stopped at the intersection of one dirt road with another, the driver uncertain where to turn, a familiar face appeared—my friend Satyavan rolling up on his motorcycle, with his young daughter riding on the back. The first face met, though not the last! In a few minutes I was

*Auroville is a blend of Le Guin, Tolkien, Huxley, and Asimov. Buildings are curved, people are known by their first names, tropical birds sing out, "Here and now! Here and now! Pay attention!!!!" Consciousness is in the air and on the tongue, large ventures are imagined against formidable odds, a forest springs out of the desert, tradition is honored and broken in the same breath, the same person, meals are a polyglot babble in a restaurant at the end of reality.*

walking through the red garden gate at the house of another friend, Paula, and sitting down to a cool breakfast of fresh mango, muesli, curd, followed by practicalities and a couple of hours conversation in the garden.

The blaring crowds of Thanjavur lie a thousand miles away; even the quaint seaside resort of Pondy feels metropolitan. Auroville is a blend of Le Guin, Tolkien, Huxley, and Asimov. Buildings are curved, people are known by their first names, tropical birds sing out, "Here and now! Here and now! Pay attention!!!!" Consciousness is in the air and on the tongue, large ventures are imagined against formidable odds, a forest springs out of the desert, tradition is honored and broken in the same breath, the same person, meals are a polyglot babble in a restaurant at the end of reality.

As I wander into Solar Kitchen, an unknown face known for years approaches—Mauna, who quickly arranges all the needful in the efficient Town Hall, where a dozen whirring desktop computers and dutifully tapping staff register, process money, and hand out Aurocards so that one can function in the moneyless economy.

The dome of the Matrimandir looms through breaks in the trees, golden, strange, beautiful, a promise and a challenge, a symbol and a center. The inner chamber will have to wait for another day, after chits are stamped and permissions granted.

Auroville International is gathering here for the next three weeks to talk and dance, plan and dream, and support the network of friends of Auroville, as neces-

sary to its survival as the tens of millions expats are to the subcontinent itself.

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville are like two binary stars circling each other in mind-space and spirit-

space, exerting a mutual attraction, their histories inextricably bound back through the eons; or the dance of spirit and matter, Purusha and Prakriti, twin poles of one reality; or a singer and accompanist, each with individual lines to play, creating a piece in harmony. The whirling planets, the cosmic dance, the music continues, and who knows where it shall go, what steps and missteps will nudge them into new tracks, what overtones and unknown forces are at work in ranges unseen, unheard?

The residents of Auroville have set themselves a formidable task these last forty years, and are still struggling to give it birth. They want to live in the future, in a culture without rules, guided by the unknown, in a society that has yet to come into being. They are surrounded by the leviathan of India, several villages on





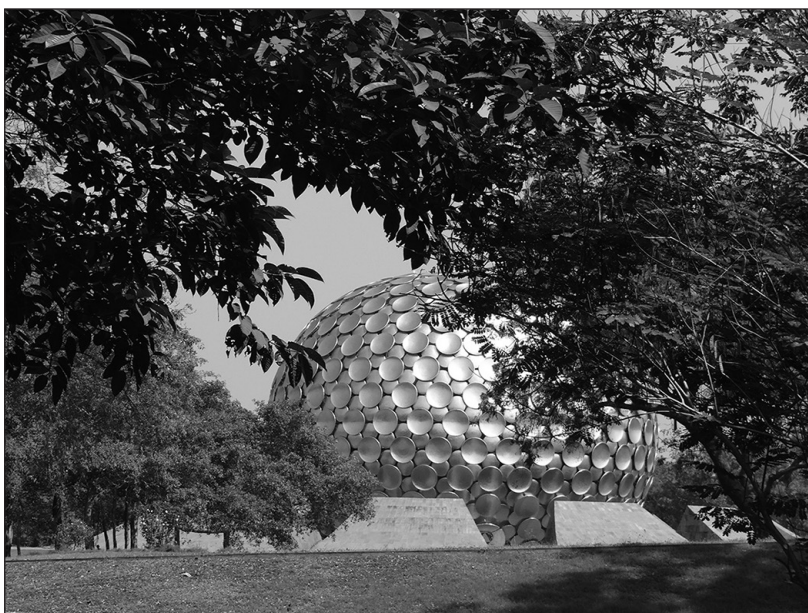
the doorstep, each with a population of tens of thousands, the politics and struggle of a developing nation at the start of 21st century exponential change.

## The Mother Ship

The middle day; the one when time stretches, if not to infinity, at least beyond the beyond.

Standing at Dreamer's Cafe, visitors' center, literally on a bicycle-hub gear-bolted tire-stand table. Languages all around: Russian, Spanish, French, Tamil, even English. The golden dome of Matrimandir rises over the trees, and the interior returns to mind, to inner sight.

Spiraling upward, the twin flames of two oil lamps mark the beginning of helices on which one slowly ascends, like some organic molecule searching for the lock to match its key, as numberless forms arise in the mind. A golden cell, the seed of an infinitesimal species magnified through warped dimensions, bursting from the earth, almost floating free on electrical forces also magnified ten thousandfold; a ship from future time, landing softly, raising ripples in the land thanks to its dense neutron star mass; the emergence of a new form of matter, dreamed into being through spiritual force, worked on by legions of precursor beings, themselves not yet of this matter even though they have carved its outer form, poured its concrete struts; a point of light visible from hundreds of light-years away, to which future generations of space-faring thoughtwisps are drawn, the disembodied minds of whole planets pulled slowly at the speed of light into the single beam, passing through the portal, into a crystalline globe, there to gaze out with bodiless eyes and quick smiles at the silent circle of humans meditating upon their light and souls.



*Matrimandir rises in the distance. (Photo by David Hutchinson)*

All true; for all that can be thought has a reality in some realm.

The Matrimandir defies individual description, history, explanation. It was several decades in the making, having been finished only in the first years of the 21st century. Numberless meetings, designs, contracts, scaffolds, rupees, arguments, agreements, bonfires, celebrations. A steady stream of disciples and tourists, Hindus and Christians and agnostics and skeptics, believers and builders, forerunners and latecomers.

Sitting in the inner chamber as a ray of light pours down through the central opening, to land on the crystal, silence and cool air, columns rising, a pure white essence of concentration. The collective aspiration and visions through the years, descent of consciousness, the breaking of barriers. Peace and strength, tears and knots, the flow of energy carrying these molecules further, further up the spiral toward an unknown future.

Pausing at the portal between outer and inner, passing your hand over the intricate granite, moving into opalescent light and slowly falling water, the letters of higher reality beckoning, bliss, consciousness, reality, anandamayi, chaitanyamayi, satyamayi, aum, the three who are one and play in many worlds.

Sitting in a meditation petal budding from the mother cell, the soul's warm flame of aspiration opening a portal above, catching a ray of spiritual light glinting from an incorporeal sun.

Walking the perimeter, feeling the blazing sun on face and arms, the cell-ship still rising, still landing, still emerging. Beyond thought, not of this century, apart from culture, a work of art that transcends, transcendence embodied in a massive physical presence.

Later, sitting with those forerunners who lifted buckets of monsoon mud, scaled the scaffolds, glued tiny scales which became the discs catching the sun, calling to thought-wisps, transforming the dreams of later generations.

## Yogi in a strange land

The surf rolls gray and rumbling this morning at the beach, as a lone star shines bravely in the east, waiting for Apollo to mount his chariot and ride roughshod over this meager light. A tinny tinkly Bollywood tune warbles from a speaker at the café, while a lone fishing boat putters along the coast. A small pack of dogs wake and bark at each other, trotting expectantly down the street. Silent walkers stride



*Welcome to India! (Photo by David Hutchinson)*



purposefully on Goubert. Humidity seeps from every pore, even at six in the morning, even in mid-winter.

When people ask me whether they should go to Burning Man, I tell them yes, if they are ready for duststorms, twenty-four-hour blasting music, crushing crowds, searing heat, dehydration, sleep deprivation, physical exhaustion. My take on India is similar. If you come here, prepare with the detail that you would a three-week backpack trip through unknown territory. Triple check all equipment, connections, maps. Have double fallbacks for health emergencies like gastroenteritis. Treat the major towns like you would a raging river at high flood.

Back in the 1980s my wife and I brought her mother to live with us in Tucson. She was living in Meridian, a tiny town smack in the middle of Texas where one could walk in five minutes to the post office, store, school. She knew every neighbor on the street, and many had grudges that went back decades. A single car driving by was an event, and a stranger on the sidewalk prompted a call to the police station.

We planned for months, rented a U-Haul to bring her few belongings, mapped the route and stops with care, arranged her room, changed our diet to accommodate hers. Three days after arriving she said, "Take me home."

Even though we lived on a house on quiet street in a nice suburb in a small city, culture shock overwhelmed her. Nobody spoke Texan; there were young people walking down the streets, including Mexicans; the grocery stores were huge and frightening. So we loaded up the van and drove her back.

My experience of India is like that. It overwhelms the senses, mind, nerves. Constant honking. Death-defying roads. Incomprehensible signs and language. Piles of bricks, garbage, crumbling buildings, gaunt figures sleeping on the sidewalk side by side with Pizza Hut and gleaming banks.

"If you wanted home, you should have stayed home." True enough. The whole point of travel is to wake up, shake

the foundations of perception, step outside the narrow walls of habit. India definitely does that!

Last week for the first time in my life I mastered the skill of using a bidet, and was darn proud. The day before it took me half an hour fiddling with a gate lock like a thief before finding the exact position, but, damn it, this thing wasn't going to get the better of me! The first time someone showed me the universal bicycle lock behind the seat, it made no sense.

Many of the people here are forthright and direct. The problem is that they're speaking Tamil, so their quick answer, open vowels and stare are disconcerting. Many a time I've stood in front of someone and said, "I don't understand," which of course they don't understand, so we go round again. "More? Less? Trespassing? Am I going to be taken out and shot?" It's never quite clear, and most of the time I've been walking on eggshells, deferential to the point of bashfulness.

This trip wasn't merely to see a different country and learn how the light switches work. We came because Pondicherry is the home of Integral Yoga, we are part of an extended sangha, have grand aspirations that link us to this town, its people, and to Auroville's multinational Shangri-La a few miles away.

For me as a writer and a yogi, this trip has two complementary parts. There is the external: food and clothing and wagging heads, which is great fun to observe and write home about. Then there is the internal, the experience of self and soul, reflection, change. Not so easy to grasp nor to write about.

"When were you here last?" would often come up in conversation, and when I replied, "Twenty years ago," eyes invariably went wide. "Really? Why?" What could I say? Life, circumstance. A belief that place doesn't matter, especially in spiritual matters: that there is no place holier than any other. The Divine lives and breathes, looks out from every face, every particle of matter.

Many years ago I made a photo plaque with Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, Vivekananda, and the Dalai Lama. Underneath their photos is one of the few par-

agraphs from Sri Aurobindo's extensive writings that I have memorized:

This infinite and eternal Self of things is an omnipresent Reality, one existence everywhere; it is a single unifying presence and not different in different creatures; it can be met, seen or felt in its completeness in each soul or each form in the universe. For its infinity is spiritual and essential and not merely a boundlessness in Space or an endlessness in Time; the Infinite can be felt in an infinitesimal atom or in a second of time as convincingly as in the stretch of the aeons or the stupendous enormity of the intersolar spaces. The knowledge or experience of it can begin anywhere and express itself through anything; for the Divine is in all, and all is the Divine. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 115-116)

"Okay—then why are you going to this little town on the coast?" was frequently asked both here and back home, and the honest answer is, "This is a pilgrimage." It's complicated.

The inner life of those I have met and lived with, as with those I spend time with every week, is dense, complex, and generally a mystery to all concerned. After a lifetime of studying philosophy, yoga, Indian thought, after reading, summarizing, explaining, leading online yoga discussion groups for a decade, it is apparent to me that the nostrums that attract us to a spiritual path are impossibly simplistic and inadequate. It is as if we are gazing at one square inch of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, entranced by a color, exclaiming "I get it! This is amazing!"

My niece wrote travel essays during trips to Spain and Central America. She was honest about herself, struggles with culture, adapting to new experience, the frustrations of being alone and voiceless in a strange land. Writing about travel is distinctly touchy: one step too far, and you fall into straw-hat parochialism; one step in the other direction, you become a withering critic.



There are so many things that still confound and escape me, small and large. Why do a certain class of women go about with the end of their sari in their mouth? To keep out dust? To hide the mouth? Why is every public area treated like a garbage dump?

A crowd has magically appeared around me here at the café. Couples are taking selfies in front of the ocean, a group of students is laughing over their coffee at the next table, waiters are bustling and rattling plates. The sun is starting to peek through a low bank of clouds over the water, illuminating them from behind, creating a splendid halo that promises light, always more light.

Even on this last day there will be more neighborly conversations around the breakfast table, as well as profound encounters with our spiritual roots. It feels like we have been here for months, years, and still there is the shock of the new and unexpected. Just as it should be!

I will miss the peculiar qualities of Pondy: the pavilions, bowers, and statue of a woman pouring water at Bharati Park; the profusion of Auro-this and Mother-that on every store, alternating with Le Something Français; the crackle of electrical lines outside houses in the morning; crowds of scrubbed identically uniformed children from St. Joseph's school; perky dogs trotting down every street. And the enfolding hospitality, breakfast with friends doing crossword puzzles while puzzling out yoga and issues of the day.

And the brilliant women's clothing! The rest of the world will seem black and white in comparison.

Automobiles are rapidly overtaking this town by the sea; in a few years there will be the crushing congestion which we saw on Saturday night, with cars lined up on both sides of tiny streets, making them

impassable. Even restrained by the weight of tradition and the heavy inertia of India, the times are moving on. The generation that knew Sri Aurobindo is almost gone, and in another ten or twenty years it will be hard to find anyone who knew the Mother.

Last night I sat over homemade chocolate chips and tea with a couple who personify the next two generations. Their apartment is in a complex at the north edge of town, very tastefully done with custom cabinetry and tile floors, looking out on a garden. He is in software security, and she teaches at the Ashram school which their seven-year-old son attends. We met twenty years ago in California, at the Lodi Ashram, itself a magnet for Pondy expats, in the context of monthly

*The same forces are at work in both places, regardless of where you come from: India is noisy, busy, crowded—and yet near the Ashram there is what many call an atmosphere, intangible but present. In the United States there is open space, a high economic and intellectual energy, a thousand distractions of media.*

retreats, camping trips, and the extended Bay Area community. I would see them several times a year, but had lost touch after they moved here a few years back.

We talked of current politics, the history of the Mughals, teaching methods, and why teachers always have a head cold. (That one I know by experience: little kids are always sneezing on you!) And the difference between living in the United States versus Pondy for those who grew up here. The same forces are at work in both places, regardless of where you come from: India is noisy, busy, crowded—and yet near the Ashram there is what many call an atmosphere, intangible but present. In the United States there is open space, a high economic and intellectual energy, a thousand distractions of media.

India has had three synthetic leaders, in my view. The three "A's"—Ashoka, Akbar, and (if one stretches the notion of leader beyond official position) Auro-

bindo. Separated by centuries, each threw a wide net over the country, welcomed different religions, encouraged the arts, progress, the life of the mind, compassion. All of these are sorely needed today both here and abroad; there are forces that oppose these directly, not to mention the swirl of the information age, global economics, and technological acceleration.

The "many-voiced human world" lies beyond a taxi and long plane ride over the Pacific Ocean. And then, another dawn, another day—what adventures await?

Fried and toasted, sunny-side up

"Where are you going?" A uniform, gun, square face staring at me. A crowd also staring, waiting impatiently for an answer. The glare of bright lights.

Was this an interrogation? Did I finally

break an international rule, make a wrong hand gesture, let my beard grow too long, step over a line? A vision of a dark cell with dinner shoved

through a slot in the floor, a metal plank, more bright lights.

Where was I going? Where had I been? The man with the gun waited, hand on gun-holding hip, his stare unwavering. The crowd inhaled and held its breath.

Out came a squeaky answer: "Uh ... Sacramento, I think? Home?" The bubble burst, a curtain lifted, reality returned, and the customs immigration checker looked at me with consummate boredom and a wave of the hand. Move on. Next.

Where was I going? Where had I been?

After thirty-three hours in transit my eyeballs felt like #60 sandpaper, skin going numb, internal organs shutting down, neurons barely sparking, legs weak and stumbly. I followed, lemminglike, the wave of people heading towards baggage, transport, doors, outside. Was this Singapore? San Francisco? Sacramento? Had I hallucinated the whole trip, and we were





## Essays

landing in Chennai, about to step into the soup of a subtropical sun?

Half an hour ago the plane had banked gracefully over an intricate pattern of estuaries, the flatlands of San Jose to the south, East Bay hills rising greenly to the east, coastal mountains with a glint of Pacific ocean to the west. This was San Francisco, California, USA, home.

An hour later my wife Anara and I were driving through rolling dayglow green hills down into the central valley. California looks astoundingly vibrant right now, touched up and painted by fairy hands, every blade of grass growing even as you watch, hillsides turned overnight from dusty brown to seaweed green, waving happily to the sunlight.

Driving into our own River Park neighborhood in Sacramento, the streets swept clean, not a leaf to be seen. Had the Swatcha Bharat ladies been here overnight?

The gardens of home, dragons and hieroglyphs, a burst of camellia, a snowfall of pear, a flock of teenagers rolling down the street on skateboards, half a moon hanging over the horizon of a pink sky.

Where had I been? To a land of ancient wisdom and modern struggles, where djinn and deva sit playing cards late into the night, politicians shake hands over rivers red with clay and blood, a hundred million people look at tomorrow with hope and anxiety. To a town where my yoga was crafted from deep experience, a map drawn for the future during the crumbling decades of the British empire in the ruins of a French colonial outpost. To a dream made from forgotten memories, hopes built on the mantras of infinity.

Where was I going? Through the portals of today's civilization, built on the stored energy of past beings not so different from ourselves, towards the springtime gardens to come. Back to familiar light switches and showers, patterns of language and clothing. Back into the stream of work and study, back from a visit to Pondicherry.

"You look fried," Anara had said, giving me a helping arm as we got lost in the airport parking structure. Yes, fried and toasted, but sunny-side up.

### Surrender in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

by Jamshed Mavawalla

*This article is an edited version of the 6th annual Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture given at Savitri Bhavan on 19 February 2016.*

Once the Mother was asked 'What is the secret of success in sadhana? She replied in just one word: 'Surrender'. (*Collected Works of the Mother (CWM)* 14: 108) In another talk the Mother says that surrender "is not just one of the necessary qualities: it is the first attitude indispensable for beginning the yoga. If one has not decided to make a total surrender, one cannot begin." (*CWM* 8: 41) Thus if one wants to pursue Integral Yoga there is a need to know and understand what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said about this secret of success in sadhana.

*Samarpan*, that is, surrender, means complete offering. Surrender is giving oneself to the Divine, to give everything one is to the Divine Shakti, to give all your actions, work, ambitions, and feelings. So wherever the word *self-giving* comes in *Savitri*, it is referring to surrender. Surrender is the decision taken to hand over the responsibility of your life to the Divine.

We shall approach the subject surrender by taking up passages which talk of surrender in the mantric poem *Savitri*. We shall also correlate these passages with quotations from other works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. First we shall take up a passage which speaks about our human surrender to the Divine. Then we shall take up passages about Aswapati's surrender, then about Savitri's surrender, and lastly, about what the Supreme has to say to Savitri about one aspect of surrender.

In Book II: canto 11, there are lines that convey that we should accept the



supremacy of the Divine Shakti, and dare to absolutely surrender to Her.

Her simple vast supremacy confess,  
Dare to surrender to her absolute.

(*Savitri, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA)* 33-34: 276)

I will read the complete passage in parts and make an effort to explain it.

But thought nor word can seize  
eternal Truth:

The whole world lives in a lonely ray  
of her sun. (p. 276)

Human thought or speech can never hope to seize the eternal Truth—Truth with capital T. Now what is this Truth that Sri Aurobindo is talking about? There are quite a few quotations which tell us that the Truth with a capital T is the Divine. (*CWSA* 28: 5) So human thought or speech can never hope to grasp or understand the entire Divine, what the whole world receives is just one ray of that sun.

In our hypnosis by one luminous  
point

We see not what small figure of her  
we hold;

We feel not her inspiring boundlessness,

We share not her immortal liberty.

Thus is it even with the seer and sage;  
For still the human limits the divine:  
(p. 276)

What the human understands is a small representation of the Divine, because humans can concentrate only on the limited



or only on one point. So we do not feel the inspiring infinity and miss the immortal freedom. This happens even with a man of wisdom, a seer and a sage. Human beings generally limit the Divine. So what is the solution?

Out of our thoughts we must leap up  
to sight,  
Breathe her divine illimitable air,  
Her simple vast supremacy confess,  
Dare to surrender to her absolute.  
(p. 276)

Sri Aurobindo tells us that we must go beyond the plane of mind and thought, and open to a direct revelation of the Divine. We must breathe the natural infinite air of the Divine Shakti. It is the Divine Shakti because the phrase "Breathe her divine illimitable air" uses the word *her*. We must accept the supremacy of the Divine Shakti, and dare to absolutely surrender to the Her because we can surrender only to a force much greater than our own to help us in the Yoga. The Divine Shakti alone has the needed force which is decisive, all-wise and without limits. The other phrase used is 'Dare to surrender'. To absolutely surrender, we need courage and completely rely on the Divine Shakti. We generally have faith in our own ability; we try to solve our own problems. It requires courage not to depend on our mind and vital strength, but to rely completely on the Divine Shakti. Then Sri Aurobindo tells us what happens when we completely depend on the Divine Shakti and completely surrender to Her.

Then the Unmanifest reflects his form  
In the still mind as in a living glass;  
The timeless Ray descends into our  
hearts  
And we are rapt into eternity. (p. 276)

When man accepts the supremacy of

the Divine Shakti and surrenders absolutely, then there are two things that will happen. Firstly, the unmanifest Divine reveals his form in the still mind. The unmanifest Divine reflects his form means one identifies with the Divine. The Mother in one of her quotations confirms this. The quotation is: "If man surrenders totally to the Divine, he identifies himself with the Divine." (CWM 14: 108)

This identification happens in the still mind, a quiet mind. This still or quiet mind is a necessary condition for complete surrender. Sri Aurobindo in one of his letters says "there must be a complete surrender and self-giving and for that...it is necessary to have a mind that can remain...quiet and allow the Divine Force to act..." (CWSA 29: 83)

*We must accept the supremacy of the Divine Shakti, and dare to absolutely surrender to the Her because we can surrender only to a force much greater than our own to help us in the Yoga. The Divine Shakti alone has the needed force which is decisive, all-wise and without limits.*

Secondly what happens when we completely surrender to the Divine is that the timeless Ray, which is the Light, descends into our hearts. One of the Mother's quotations that brings out the same idea says: "Offer sincerely to the Divine your obscurities and you will be able to receive the light." (CWM 14: 99)

And we are rapt into eternity.

In surrender we feel rapturous with the bliss of the Divine. Here I am reminded of the following quotation from Sri Aurobindo: "...a very rapturous thing [is absolute surrender to the Divine] as anyone who has done it can tell you." (CWSA 29: 21)

In this passage of *Savitri* we saw that to know the eternal Truth or to know the Divine, we have to accept the supremacy of the Divine Shakti and absolutely surrender to the Divine Shakti. Then we can realize the Divine in the quiet mind and

the Light descends into our heart. The surrender is a very rapturous, blissful thing.

But one can ask how do we surrender? The answer is to remember every moment and offer oneself, offer all your work, offer all your thoughts and feelings, then your entire life is taken up and offered to the divine and the surrender can be complete. The best example of the process of surrender is explained by Udar in the book *Udar, one of Mother's children*. As we all know that Udar Pinto was a great instrument and has done a lot of Mother's work. Nearly all the commercial departments of the Ashram were started by Udar Pinto.

One day he asked the Mother, "I have been doing the Yoga for many years but I am not absolutely certain how to do the yoga of Sri Aurobindo. I have read all the books and

try to do the yoga but I am not certain how far I have progressed." So he asks the Mother to help him out. The Mother said: "You are doing it all wrong." Then he asked "But

what shall I do?" She replied, "I will do the yoga for you." Udar was thrilled! And he asked "What do I have to do?" The Mother replied "Give yourself over to me and I will do it for you." (p. 141) This is the real secret, give yourself, offer yourself, whatever you are and she can then work in you. When you offer yourself then the divine Mother can penetrate in us and work in us.

Then Udar asked "How do I surrender?" Then the Mother showed him how to do detailed offering, detailed surrender by asking another question. "When you get up in the morning, what is the first thing you do?" He said, "I brush my teeth." She asked how do you brush your teeth. He wondered and said, "How? Like everybody else does." She said, "Then you are doing it unconsciously. Instead, think of me while you are doing it. Think that I am doing it." (p. 141) When you offer the act of brushing the teeth, and the Mother accepts the offering, then she is doing the act of brushing the teeth with you.



Now we shall look at the surrender of Aswapati. The first time in the book *Savit-ri* that Aswapati's surrender is mentioned is in Book II, Canto 14, "The World-Soul." Here, as an answer to his yearning, Aswapati has a darshan of the Divine Mother. Here Sri Aurobindo describes the Divine Mother, as "The sole omnipotent Goddess ever-veiled."

He saw the mystic outline of a face.  
Overwhelmed by her implacable  
light and bliss, (p. 296)

And in supreme answer to the yearning of Aswapati's heart, Aswapati sees the mystic outline of a face of the divine Mother and he is overwhelmed by unstoppable light and bliss.

Drunk with a deep golden spiritual  
wine,  
He cast from the rent stillness of his  
soul  
A cry of adoration and desire  
And the surrender of his boundless  
mind  
And the self-giving of his silent heart.  
He fell down at her feet unconscious,  
prone. (p. 296)

Aswapati, intoxicated with the divine spirit, breaks out of the silence of his soul into a cry of adoration and seeking. Then, with the surrender of his boundless mind and the self-giving of his silent heart—and we know that self giving is nothing but surrender—he fell down at the feet of the Divine Mother. Here we have an indication that Aswapati had already surrendered himself to the Divine Mother. The surrender of his boundless mind and heart means that Aswapati had already surrendered his mind and heart to the Divine Mother. Here Sri Aurobindo also gives a hint, an indication about the method of surrendering to the Divine.

In one quotation, the Mother says that the process of surrender, the offering of ourselves "is done either through the mind or the heart or the emotion or the life-impulse or through all of them together." (CWM 14: 107)

How is the surrender done by the mind? The mind understands the need to surrender and makes a resolution to remember and offer. Sri Aurobindo in one quotation says "a clear and sincere mind seeing the necessity of surrender." (CWSA 28: 385) The mind can also control all that comes in the way of surrender. Mind can enforce a clear and sincere will on the disobedient members to surrender.

And the self-giving of his silent heart.  
(p. 296)

The self-giving of the heart is nothing but the surrender of the heart, the emotions. The self giving of the heart is offering with adoration or devotion. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo explains how the self-giving of the heart with adoration is done. Here Sri Aurobindo quotes the Gita:

'He who gives to me with a heart of adoration a leaf, a flower, a fruit or a cup of water, I take and enjoy that offering of his devotion'; and it is not only any dedicated external gift that can be so offered with love and devotion, but all our thoughts, all our feelings and sensations, all our outward activities and their forms and objects can be such gifts to the Eternal. (CWSA 23: 162-163)

This idea that Aswapati had already surrendered also comes in another passage in Book III:

His living, sacrificed and offered  
heart  
Absorbed in adoration mystical,  
Turned to its far-off fount of light  
and love. (p. 332)

Here Sri Aurobindo speaks of Aswapati's sacrificed and offered heart. *Offered heart* as we know means surrendered heart. Even *sacrificed heart* means surrendered heart. To help us understand the word *sacrifice* I will read a quotation: "In the spiritual sense, ... sacrifice has a different meaning—it does not indicate giving up what is dear to us. [It means] offering

of oneself... It has the original sense of 'making sacred.'" (CWSA 28: 433) Making sacred is consecration, which means when we offer and the Divine takes our offering it becomes sacred.

Here too the heart is sacrificed and offered, meaning that the process of offering has been completed. In this passage, Aswapati has offered his heart as a living sacrifice for the great work of transformation.

His living, sacrificed and offered  
heart  
Absorbed in adoration mystical,  
Turned to its far-off fount of light  
and love. (p. 332)

"Absorbed in adoration mystical." *Absorbed* means absolutely concentrated. This surrendered heart was absolutely concentrated in mystical adoration of the Supreme Divine Mother. This adoration is turned upward to its far-off distant fount, the source of light and love. Here in this passage is brought out another important aspect of surrender.

In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo says: "It is evident, to begin with, that, even if such a discipline [self-giving to the Eternal] is begun without devotion, it leads straight and inevitably towards the highest devotion possible; ... the most profound God-love." (CWSA 23: 112)

Now we will see the third and the last passage, in fact it is just one line where Sri Aurobindo points out the surrender of Aswapati. Sri Aurobindo says:

A vast surrender was his only  
strength." (p. 315)

What is a *vast* surrender? *Vast* includes the surrender of the complete being, an absolute surrender. But then Sri Aurobindo says that 'A vast surrender was his only strength'. Why is it his only strength? I am emphasising the word *only*. Human beings have the strength of their physical, vital, and mental will-power. If surrender was his only strength, that means that these strengths of the human being were not there with Aswapati.





To understand what Sri Aurobindo means by “only strength,” I will bring out the gist of another quote. In this quotation, Sri Aurobindo compares the path of surrender with other paths of doing Yoga. He says that “even 1) the most powerful Rajayogic self-control, 2) the most developed pranayama, 3) the most strenuous meditation, 4) the most ecstatic Bhakti, 5) the most self-denying action, mighty as they are and efficacious, are comparatively weak in their results. For those are all limited to a certain extent by our capacity, but this [path of surrender] is illimitable in potency because it is God’s capacity.” (CWSA 13: 74)

The result of surrender is infinite in potency, because it is God’s capacity. All other strengths have their limitations, their constraints, but this strength of surrender is far more than any other strength that men can possess. So the only strength that Aswapati has is God’s strength which is illimitable and infinite in its potency. But the strength of surrender also has a limitation. It is only limited by the Divine will which knows what is best for the world and for each of us in the world.

And with this only strength of Aswapati, what did he achieve? He could achieve the highest personal sadhana that anyone can achieve, and could compel the Divine Mother to take birth to help humanity.

Now let us have a look at passages which talk about the surrender of Savitri. In Book I, Canto II where Sri Aurobindo describes who Savitri is, there is a line which indicates that surrender was natural to her.

A wide self-giving was her native act;  
(p. 15)

The self-giving is done to the Divine, and self-giving means surrender. So here we see that this surrender was her native act, her second nature. This act of self-giving happened in her spontaneously all the time.

A wide self-giving was her native act;  
A magnanimity as of sea or sky  
Enveloped with its greatness all that came

And gave a sense as of a greatened world: (p. 15)

When self-giving becomes a natural act, then all acts are taken up by the Divine Mother and so they are not limited but become magnanimous. As magnanimous as the sea or sky. When the Divine Mother enters or participates in all our acts, the atmosphere around becomes great and gives a sense of greatened world.

The process of remembering every second and offering every act is the process of surrender. But the question arises that in some work where our mind is concentrated in work how can we remember and offer every moment or every act to the Divine?

*The result of surrender is infinite in potency, because it is God’s capacity. All other strengths have their their limitations, their constraints...*

I am reminded of a story where this is emphasized. We know that Narad was a great devotee of Vishnu. Narad possibly wanted to hear this from the Lord so he asks Vishnu “Lord tell me who is your most beloved disciple.” Vishnu tells him that there is a farmer on the earth who is his most beloved devotee. Narad then asks him why that farmer is his most beloved devotee and not he. Vishnu then tells that he will give a task to Narad which he must fulfil. He gives him a vessel filled with oil, filled up to the brim. Then he tells Narad to go round the world with this vessel but the condition is that not a drop of oil should fall down. Narad concentrates while going round the world so that not a drop of oil falls down. He is very happy that he has completed his task successfully and now Vishnu will have to accept that he is the most beloved disciple. But Vishnu asks him, while going round the world how many times did he remember the Lord and offer the act? Narad exclaims, how

can he remember the Lord for he was all the time concentrating on the vessel that not a drop should fall down. Then Vishnu tells him that the farmer is a married man, and has lot of responsibilities, he does all the work that a man is supposed to do but he remembers me all the time and offers all his works to me and so he is my most beloved disciple.

If we cannot remember the Divine during every second of our work, then in one of the letters Sri Aurobindo gives us a solution for beginners:

If you can’t as yet remember the Divine all the time you are working, it does not greatly matter. To remember and dedicate at the beginning and give thanks at the end ought to be enough for the present. Or at the most to remember too when there is a pause... When people remember all the time during work (it can be done), it is usually with the back of their minds or else there is created gradually a faculty of ... double consciousness—

one in front that works, and one within that witnesses and remembers. (CWSA 29: 214)

So when Savitri’s self giving was her native act, her second nature, that means that she may be able to do this by a faculty of double consciousness in which her inner being offers constantly while her outer being does the acts.

The second time Sri Aurobindo mentions Savitri’s surrender is in Book VII, Canto 5: “The Finding of the Soul.” In this passage, Sri Aurobindo is referring to the inward journey of Savitri to find her soul.

Onward she passed seeking the soul’s mystic cave.

At first she stepped into a night of God. (p. 522)

Savitri goes ahead in her search of her soul into the secret cave. This journey is going within. At first she finds herself in



the supernatural darkness that intervenes before one reaches God. Sri Aurobindo describes this darkness as a night of God.

The light was quenched that helps  
the labouring world,  
The power that struggles and stumbles  
in our life;  
This inefficient mind gave up its  
thoughts,  
The striving heart its unavailing  
hopes. (p. 522)

The light that helps man in this world is extinguished in this night; the power that helps man in this world is not available in the night of God. When the heart strives then there is always a hope, but here in the night of God the striving heart gave up its vain hopes.

All knowledge failed and the Idea's  
forms  
...  
The unseen Light she could not  
claim nor own.  
In a simple purity of emptiness  
Her mind knelt down before the  
unknowable.  
All was abolished save her naked self  
(p. 522)

Here the knowledge fails and all forms taken by the Idea fails and the unseen light she can neither claim for herself nor possess. In this pure emptiness, all strength is abolished.

All was abolished save her naked self  
And the prostrate yearning of her  
surrendered heart: (p. 522)

When all help and strength is abolished and there is no hope, only then the phrase 'surrendered heart' comes. The reason is that it is only the surrendered heart that can help one in the inward journey to find the soul or psychic being.

To help us understand how surrender helps in the inward journey to find one's soul, we will refer to a passage of the *The Life Divine*, in the chapter "The Triple Transformation." (CWSA 22: 938-939)

Between our outer nature and our inner being there is a thick wall. This thick wall screens our inner being from our outer awareness. Even before the purification of the outer nature is effected, one can still break down this thick wall. But this is a premature movement and has serious dangers.

In entering within one may start having some supernormal chaotic experiences which one may not understand. There can be forces which may chaotically drive the being. One may keep wandering in a wilderness of glamour but this glamour is a deception.

Here in this supernatural darkness there can be voices and influences which will claim to be the Divine Being, while in truth they are of a very different character. We can be misled from the true way of the inner life and even fail to find our way out into the true realisation.

Sri Aurobindo explains that for this penetration into the luminous crypt of the soul, there are few useful aids for this difficult passage. They are the methods of: 1) detachment, 2) a concentration in the heart, 3) austerity, 4) self-purification and 5) rejection of the old mind movements and life movements, 6) rejection of the ego and desire. But the strongest, and the most central way is a path of self-offering and surrender of ourselves and of our parts of nature to the Divine Being. (CWSA 22: 940)

Once we completely surrender to the Divine Shakti, then she carries us on the path. This is one of the main reasons why there is a need to surrender to the Divine Shakti in the Integral Yoga. The dangers of Yoga are avoided by the path of surrender. There is a quotation of the Mother which says that "The path of surrender is safe and sure. ... If you take up this path of surrender fully and sincerely, there is no more danger or serious difficulty." (CWM 3: 4-5)

When Savitri starts her journey inward to find her soul, she had already surrendered herself, and that is the reason she could overcome all obstacles and dangers of the path.

Now I wish to emphasize the phrase "the prostrate yearning of her surrendered heart." The Mother points out that one of

the three ways by which total self-giving or complete surrender to the Divine can be done is to prostrate oneself at the Divine's feet. (CWM 14: 102-103)

In this passage where it is mentioned that Savitri had surrendered herself, in the continuation of the same sentence, there is a description of her egoless state.

All was abolished save her naked self  
And the prostrate yearning of her  
surrendered heart:  
There was no strength in her, no  
pride of force;  
The lofty burning of desire had sunk  
Ashamed, a vanity of separate self,  
The hope of spiritual greatness fled,  
Salvation she asked not nor a heavenly crown:  
Humility seemed now too proud a  
state. (p. 522)

There was no pride in Savitri. Her high flaming desire sinks down as if ashamed realizing it to be vanity of self that presumes to think itself as separate. There was no asking for spiritual greatness or salvation or a heavenly crown. Even humility seemed like a proud state because she had reached the egoless state.

There is a linkage between complete surrender and the egoless state. Sri Aurobindo in one of his letters says that: "a complete surrender means to cut the knot of the ego in each part of the being and offer it, free and whole, to the Divine." (CWSA 29: 72-73) Another quotation says that "Egoism goes when the individual...is entirely surrendered to the Divine." (CWSA 28: 124)

In the poem *Savitri*, the third time Savitri's surrender is shown is when she had realised her soul and the different centers of her consciousness have been transformed.

Behind all reigned her sovereign  
deathless soul:  
Casting aside its veil of Ignorance,  
...  
Surrendered into the great World-  
Mother's hands  
Only she obeyed her sole supreme  
behest



In the enigma of the Inconscient's world. (p. 530)

Behind all the changed movements of the different centers of consciousness, the immortal soul of Savitri is the supreme ruler. Generally in human beings the ruler is either the vital or the mind. But now Savitri is completely ruled by her soul or psychic being. Then there come the lines that convey that Savitri had surrendered herself into the hands of the great World-Mother and follows only the great World-Mother's supreme Will in the riddle of our Inconscient world. There is a correlation between realizing one's psychic being and surrendering to the Divine Mother. There is a quotation of Sri Aurobindo that says "If the psychic manifests, it will...ask you to... surrender to the Mother." (CWSA 32: 147)

He also says, "When the psychic awakes, it can bring a sudden and true surrender of the whole being" (CWSA 29: 83-84) In fact, Sri Aurobindo goes to the extent of saying that "No complete surrender is possible without the psychic opening." (CWSA 29: 76)

So it is natural that after realizing the soul, Savitri surrendered herself into the great World-Mother's hands and only obeyed the supreme Divine Mother. When one has realized one's soul, one has already achieved the aim of realizing the Divine. Then why is there a need to surrender? Because in Integral Yoga, realizing the divinity in oneself is just a first step and not the goal. The last step of brining the supramental force to transform the mind, vital and physical will need a far more superior Power, and the power of the Divine Mother is limitless and decisive.

In these passages we saw that Aswapati and Savitri both had already surrendered. But what about us, we humans who are making an effort to remember and offer, trying to surrender or groping to do sadhana. A question can come to our mind that when we offer, we can only offer imperfectly or partly. In that case does the divine Mother accept our offering? I will give two examples that will prove that the Mother does accept our offering.

We have known Amal Kiran as a poet, an author, and a humorist, but today I will talk about him as a flower painter. The Mother had given him drawing materials like sketching pads, paint brushes, and crayons. Every morning after the Pranam, he would paint the flower while it was fresh. There were certain times when Amal had felt that he had done them with a great deal of cleverness and was proud of it. Every week the Mother use to inspect his drawing book. When she turned the pages, she would just pass over the paintings and give no comment on the ones that he felt had been done with great deal of cleverness. But she would pause and smiled and appreciated very much whatever was done with real remembrance of her and with an inner gesture of offering to her. This is an incident which shows that the Mother could recognize whatever was done with offering to her.

There is another example which shows that the Mother recognized whatever was done with offering to her. In Sri Smriti, where many things used by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are kept, there is a small and very simple ribbon with stitching kept. When the Mother saw the ribbon she could recognize that every effort in stitching was offered to her the divine Mother. The Mother must have appreciated this offered ribbon so much that Sri Smriti people have kept it among other items that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have used. The very fact that the Mother could recognize this just by seeing it shows that when we offer anything to her, the Mother receives it.

Sri Aurobindo has written sonnet 'Surrender'. A sonnet is often about the poet's personal experience. The first line of the sonnet 'Surrender' is: 'O Thou of whom I am the instrument.' (CWSA 2: 611) Sri Aurobindo says that he is the instrument of the Divine. When the surrender is complete then one becomes the true instrument of the Divine.

In Book XI, Savitri refuses all the gifts of solitary bliss and other things offered by the Supreme for herself. Then she says, "Thy sweetness give to me for earth and men." (p. 697). This line shows that Savitri

wants to become an instrument of the Supreme, so that whatever the Supreme Lord wants to give to humanity, it could be given through Savitri.

In the next lines that I will read, it is the Supreme who tells Savitri that she is his instrument. These lines bring out some aspect of being an instrument or a channel of the Divine through complete surrender.

O beautiful body of the incarnate  
Word,  
Thy thoughts are mine, I have spoken  
with thy voice.  
My will is thine, what thou hast chosen  
I choose:  
All thou hast asked I give to earth  
and men. (p. 698)

This is an example of becoming a complete instrument of the Divine. The Supreme says that Savitri's thoughts are His thoughts and whatever the Supreme wants to speak He will speak through Savitri. The Supreme's Will is Savitri's will and whatever Savitri has chosen is in fact chosen by the Supreme. Here the surrender is so complete; the instrumentation is so complete that the Supreme Divine will give to humanity through Savitri.

Then the Supreme tells her what He would do to the surrendered instrument.

I lay my hands upon thy soul of flame,  
I lay my hands upon thy heart of  
love, (p. 698)

"I lay my hands" is a beautiful poetic imagery meaning I will capture you, I will possess you. The Supreme says that because you have surrendered, I will capture your soul and your heart of love. How does the Divine capture us in surrender? In surrender, by the act of self-giving, we allow the Divine to penetrate us and possess us. When the Divine captures us, what does the Divine do? The Divine perfects the human being so that one becomes fit for divine living. (CWSA 23: 613)

I yoke thee to my power of work in  
Time. (p. 698)





'I yoke thee'. Yoke is a wooden cross piece fastened over the neck of two bullocks to plough the field. So that is the kind of work the Supreme says he will take from Savitri, yoking his power in time. So when we become the true instrument, the divine can get His work done through us. Again after few lines:

I bind by thy heart's passion thy  
heart to mine (p. 698)

The Supreme says that he will tie or bind Savitri's heart to his by her heart's passion. The phrase "heart's passion" brings out three aspects. The first is that when your heart passionately wants to do things, it means that there is willingness on your part, you are wilfully choosing to do it. Secondly, the heart's passion can only come when there is a joy in the act of offering. And thirdly, passion implies there is an enthusiasm and ardour in the act of giving to the Divine.

On similar lines, there is a quotation of the Mother which says, "To make your surrender total, ...you must choose to make your surrender total, otherwise you will not do it, it will not get done by itself. It is you who must want to do it." (CWM 4: 342-343) Sri Aurobindo also brings out this same point when he says, "The Supreme demands your surrender to her, but does not impose it: ... Your surrender must be self-made and free; it must be the surrender of a living being, not of an inert mechanical tool." (CWSA 32: 4)

Regarding the joy and enthusiasm in one's self-giving to the Divine, the Mother says, "Well, the surrender, that is, the self-giving to the Divine, must be happy, joyful, made gladly..." (CWM 4: 357) She also says, "...you can give yourself with much enthusiasm..." (CWM 4: 134)

These three points are important to remember when one wants to surrender: 1) you must choose to make your surrender total; 2) the self-giving to the Divine must

be happy and joyful, made gladly; and 3) you must offer yourself with much enthusiasm. Returning to the lines of *Savitri*,

And lay my splendid yoke upon thy  
soul.

Now will I do in thee my marvellous  
works. (p. 698)

What is this marvellous work which the Supreme wants to do? This marvellous work is the work for the next step in the evolution. In the next four lines we will see how the Supreme prepares us for the work of the next step of evolution when we become an instrument.

I will fasten thy nature with my cords  
of strength, (p. 698)

*The Divine Consciousness is above us. By the act of self-giving the Divine Force descends in us and increases our capacity and receptivity. This increase in receptivity brings down a yet stronger Divine Force which will further increase our capacity and strength.*

When we become the instrument of the Divine through surrender, then the Divine can come into us and fasten our nature with his cords of strength. How does the divine fasten our nature with his cords of strength?

The Divine Consciousness is above us. By the act of self-giving the Divine Force descends in us and increases our capacity and receptivity. This increase in receptivity brings down a yet stronger Divine Force which will further increase our capacity and strength.

But for this to continuously happen, there must be on our part a progressive surrender into the hands of the Divine that allows the Divine Power do with us whatever is needed for the work. (CWSA 12: 169-170)

Subdue to my delight thy spirit's  
limbs

And make thee a vivid knot of all my  
bliss (p. 698)

Not only strength will descend, but we will be overwhelmed by the Divine's delight. This delight will make us blissful. A quotation from Sri Aurobindo which brings this out says: "... (*atma-samarpana*) does not exclude a will for the delight of oneness..." (SABCL 21: 738) Another quotation from Sri Aurobindo says: "The Divine gives itself to those who give themselves without reserve and in all their parts to the Divine. For them the calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of knowledge, the seas of Ananda. (CWSA 29: 67)

And build in thee my proud and  
crystal home. (p. 698)

The phrase 'my proud and crystal home' means the Divine's superior and lucent form. So in surrender, after giving us divine strength and ananda, then the supreme will create a body of the next step in the evolu-

tion, which is superior and lucent, transparent, sparkling home. This home is the supramental body.

Then after a few lines,

I will pursue thee across the centu-  
ries;

Thou shalt be hunted through the  
world by love, (p. 699)

When one becomes a true instrument then the Divine does not leave us, the Divine will pursue us, chase us for ages. What better thing can happen then the divine chasing us? This chase, this hunting will be done by love.

Nowhere shalt thou escape my living  
eyes. (p. 699)

Nowhere will we be able escape from the Divine's living eyes. In short, the Divine will be with us for ages in our future lives.



I will pour delight from thee as from  
a jar,  
I will whirl thee as my chariot  
through the ways, (p. 701)

This pouring of delight will be on those who come into contact with Savitri. On meeting Savitri, mankind will feel the delight of the Divine. The Supreme will whirl Savitri as the Supreme's chariot through the pathways of the universe. What are these pathways of the universe? They are paths of evolution.

I will use thee as my sword and as  
my lyre,  
I will play on thee my minstrelsies of  
thought. (p. 701)

The Supreme will use thee as his sword and as his lyre. The sword, to destroy, represents the work of Mahakali. A lyre is a musical instrument, and a minstrel is a musician or singer; these represent the work of Mahalaxmi. For the activities of both Mahakali and Mahalaxmi, the Supreme will use Savitri.

Who hunts and seizes me, my captive grows;  
This shalt thou henceforth learn  
from thy heart-beats. (p. 702)

Normally when you hunt and seize a thing, you are the master, but when you pursue the Divine, the more you pursue the more you become captive. This is the only hunt where hunter becomes the hunted. When you surrender yourself and become an instrument of the Divine, then in fact you become the captive of the Divine.

For ever love, O beautiful slave of  
God! (p. 702).

We must first understand what slave of God means. When one surrenders, one wants to obey only the Divine's will. This can happen by becoming an instrument of the Divine Being, a channel of the Divine

Being. But an instrument or channel is usually not a living being. A servant of the Divine is a better example of the surrender of a living being. But the best example of the complete surrender of a living being is a slave of God. A slave does not have a will of his own; he obeys the will of the Master. A slave is completely dependent on the Master and is controlled by the Master.

For ever love, O beautiful slave of  
God! (p. 702)

"For ever love" means to be consumed by love divine. Then one willingly, lovingly wants to be a captive of the Divine, and becomes a beautiful slave of God! The highest form of surrender is to become a loving, willing slave of God, and it is divine love that makes it beautiful. This phrase 'O beautiful slave of God!' is the highest state one can achieve by surrender.

*The highest form of surrender is to become a loving, willing slave of God, and it is divine love that makes it beautiful. This phrase 'O beautiful slave of God!' is the highest state one can achieve by surrender.*

O lasso of my rapture's widening  
noose,  
Become my cord of universal love.  
(p. 702)

The Divine throws this lasso on our souls, captures our souls, and the Supreme takes care of us from birth to birth. To be caught by the divine lasso you have to be graced, otherwise we are caught by the lassos of the world. This lasso is similar to the golden chain, a cord of universal love. Once you love the Mother you are captured forever. Sri Aurobindo has put the same idea in *Savitri* that the Mother has said in prose.

Nolini Kant Gupta tells that the Mother has said: "Whoever gets my touch, whoever has a second of true aspiration, true love for me, he is finished for life, for all lives—he is bound to me. I have put a golden chain round his neck, his heart is

bound eternally to me."

Now I shall narrate the Mother's experience while reading this line, "For ever love, O beautiful slave of God!" About this line the Mother says:

... the line of Savitri that gave me the most overpowering experience of the entire book ... And when I came to this particular line ... I was as if suddenly swept up and engulfed in ... eternal Truth. Everything was abolished except this: For ever love, O beautiful slave of God!  
That alone existed. (*Invocation*, no. 6, February 2000, p. 35)

There is another experience of the Mother when she read this line. The Mother has recited passages from Book XI of *Savitri*. The Mother disclosed that in the line 'For ever love, O beautiful slave of God!' the word she saw in place of 'beautiful' was 'powerful'. Though she did not read 'powerful'. In the late hours of the evening, when she used to be inwardly absorbed in Sri Aurobindo's presence, she asked

him why she had that variant in the line. He answered: "What you have read is a truth—but a truth of the future. At present, 'beautiful' and not 'powerful' is the true word." (*Invocation* No. 9, November 2000, p. 42)

This surrender of the slave of God which is beautiful will become a powerful slave of God, powerful to take humanity to the next step of evolution.

I end this talk with a short prayer.

"O our sweet Divine Mother,

Help us to remember all the time to offer all our activities, and offer ourselves to you.

May our self giving become a native act, our second nature.

May our surrender become absolute.

May we become a beautiful slave of the Divine Mother in this very life.

Amen!



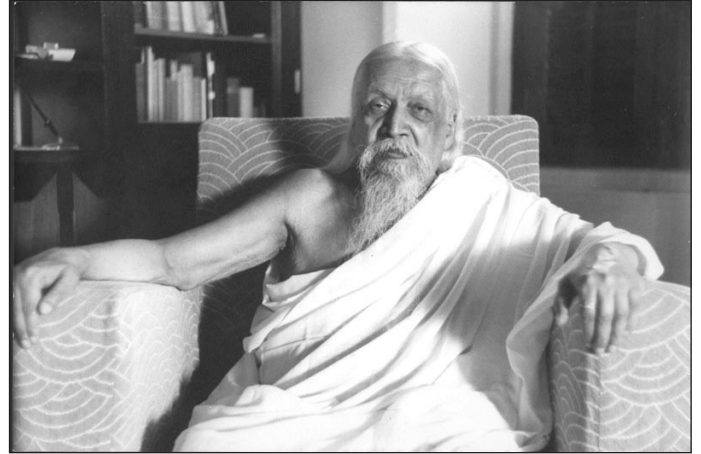
## Source Material

### Faith and the Divine Shakti

by Sri Aurobindo

The faith demanded of us both in its general principle and its constant particular application amounts to a large and ever increasing and a constantly purer, fuller and stronger assent of the whole being and all its parts to the presence and guidance of God and the Shakti. The faith in the Shakti, as long as we are not aware of and filled with her presence, must necessarily be preceded or at least accompanied by a firm and virile faith in our own spiritual will and energy and our power to move successfully towards unity and freedom and perfection. Man is given faith in himself, his ideas and his powers that he may work and create and rise to greater things and in the end bring his strength as a worthy offering to the altar of the Spirit. This spirit, says the Scripture, is not to be won by the weak, *nayam ātmā balahīnena labhyah*. All paralysing self-distrust has to be discouraged, all doubt of our strength to accomplish, for that is a false assent to impotence, an imagination of weakness and a denial of the omnipotence of the spirit. A present incapacity, however heavy may seem its pressure, is only a trial of faith and a temporary difficulty and to yield to the sense of inability is for the seeker of the integral Yoga a non-sense, for his object is a development of a perfection that is there already, latent in the being, because man carries the seed of the divine life in himself, in his own spirit, the possibility of success is involved and implied in the effort and victory is assured because behind is the call and guidance of an omnipotent power. At the same time this faith in oneself must be purified from all touch of rajasic egoism and spiritual pride. The sadhaka should keep as much as possible in his mind the idea that his strength is not his own in the egoistic sense but that of the divine universal Shakti and whatever is egoistic in his use of it must be a cause of limitation and in the end an obstacle. The power of the divine universal Shakti which is behind our aspiration is illimitable, and when it is rightly called upon it cannot fail to pour itself into us and to remove whatever incapacity and obstacle, now or later; for the times and durations of our struggle while they depend at first, instrumentally and in part, on the strength of our faith and our endeavour, are yet eventually in the hands of the wisely determining secret Spirit, alone the Master of the Yoga, the Ishwara.

The faith in the divine Shakti must be always at the back of our strength and when she becomes manifest, it must be or grow implicit and complete. There is nothing that is impossible to her who is the conscious Power and universal Goddess all creative from eternity and armed with the Spirit's omnipotence. All knowledge, all strengths, all triumph and victory, all skill and works are in her hands and they are full of the treasures of the Spirit and of all perfections and siddhis. She is Maheshwari, goddess of the supreme knowledge, and brings to us her vision for all



kinds and widenesses of truth, her rectitude of the spiritual will, the calm and passion of her supramental largeness, her felicity of illumination: she is Mahakali, goddess of the supreme strength, and with her are all mights and spiritual force and severest austerity of tapas and swiftness to the battle and the victory and the laughter, the attahasya, that makes light of defeat and death and the powers of the ignorance: she is Mahalakshmi, the goddess of the supreme love and delight, and her gifts are the spirit's grace and the charm and beauty of the Ananda and protection and every divine and human blessing: she is Mahasaraswati, the goddess of divine skill and of the works of the Spirit, and hers is the Yoga that is skill in works, *yogah karmasu kauśalam*, and the utilities of divine knowledge and the self-application of the spirit to life and the happiness of its harmonies. And in all her powers and forms she carries with her the supreme sense of the masteries of the eternal Ishwari, a rapid and divine capacity for all kinds of action that may be demanded from the instrument, oneness, a participating sympathy, a free identity, with all energies in all beings and therefore a spontaneous and fruitful harmony with all the divine will in the universe. The intimate feeling of her presence and her powers and the satisfied assent of all our being to her workings in and around it is the last perfection of faith in the Shakti.

And behind her is the Ishwara and faith in him is the most central thing in the *śraddhā* of the integral Yoga. This faith we must have and develop to perfection that all things are the workings under the universal conditions of a supreme self-knowledge and wisdom, that nothing done in us or around us is in vain or without its appointed place and just significance, that all things are possible when the Ishwara as our supreme Self and Spirit takes up the action and that all that has been done before and all that he will do hereafter was and will be part of his infallible and foreseeing guidance and intended towards the fruition of our Yoga and our perfection and our life work. This faith will be more and more justified as the higher knowledge opens, we shall begin to see the great and small significances that escaped our limited mentality and faith will pass into knowledge. Then we shall see beyond the possibility of doubt that all happens within





the working of the one Will and that that will was also wisdom because it develops always the true workings in life of the self and nature. The highest state of the assent, the *śraddhā* of the being will be when we feel the presence of the Ishwara and feel all our existence and consciousness and thought and will and action in his hand and consent in all things and with every part of ourself and nature to the direct and immanent and occupying will of the Spirit. And that highest perfection of the *śraddhā* will also be the opportunity and perfect foundation of a divine strength: it will base, when complete, the development and manifestation and the works of the luminous supramental Shakti. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 779-782)

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The full recognition of this inner Guide, Master of the Yoga, lord, light, enjoyer and goal of all sacrifice and effort, is of the utmost importance in the path of integral perfection. It is immaterial whether he is first seen as an impersonal Wisdom, Love and Power behind all things, as an Absolute manifesting in the relative and attracting it, as one's highest Self and the highest Self of all, as a Divine Person within us and in the world, in one of his—or her—numerous forms and names or as the ideal which the mind conceives. In the end we perceive that he is all and more than all these things together. The mind's door of entry to the conception of him must necessarily vary according to the past evolution and the present nature.

This inner Guide is often veiled at first by the very intensity of our personal effort and by the ego's preoccupation with itself and its aims. As we gain in clarity and the turmoil of egoistic effort gives place to a calmer self-knowledge, we recognise the source of the growing light within us. We recognise it retrospectively as we realise how all our obscure and conflicting movements have been determined towards an end that we only now begin to perceive, how even before our entrance into the path of the Yoga the evolution of our life has been designedly led towards its turning-point. For now we begin to understand the sense of our struggles and efforts, successes and failures. At last we are able to seize the meaning of our ordeals and sufferings and can appreciate the help that was given us by all that hurt and resisted and the utility of our very falls and stumblings. We recognise this divine leading afterwards, not retrospectively but immediately, in the moulding of our thoughts by a transcendent Seer, of our will and actions by an all-embracing Power, of our emotional life by an all-attracting and all-assimilating Bliss and Love. We recognise it too in a more personal relation that from the first touched or at the last seizes us; we feel the eternal presence of a supreme Master, Friend, Lover, Teacher. We recognise it in the essence of our being as that develops into likeness and oneness with a greater and wider existence; for we perceive that this miraculous development is not the result of our own efforts: an eternal Perfection is moulding us into its own image. One who is the Lord or Ishwara of the Yogic philosophies, the Guide in the conscious

being (*caitya guru* or *antaryāmin*), the Absolute of the thinker, the Unknowable of the Agnostic, the universal Force of the materialist, the supreme Soul and the supreme Shakti, the One who is differently named and imaged by the religions, is the Master of our Yoga. To see, know, become and fulfil this One in our inner selves and in all our outer nature, was always the secret goal and becomes now the conscious purpose of our embodied existence. To be conscious of him in all parts of our being and equally in all that the dividing mind sees as outside our being, is the consummation of the individual consciousness. To be possessed by him and possess him in ourselves and in all things is the term of all empire and mastery. To enjoy him in all experience of passivity and activity, of peace and of power, of unity and of difference is the happiness which the Jiva, the individual soul manifested in the world, is obscurely seeking. This is the entire definition of the aim of integral Yoga; it is the rendering in personal experience of the truth which universal Nature has hidden in herself and which she travails to discover. It is the conversion of the human soul into the divine soul and of natural life into divine living.

The surest way towards this integral fulfilment is to find the Master of the secret who dwells within us, open ourselves constantly to the divine Power which is also the divine Wisdom and Love and trust to it to effect the conversion. But it is difficult for the egoistic consciousness to do this at all at the beginning. And, if done at all, it is still difficult to do it perfectly and in every strand of our nature. It is difficult at first because our egoistic habits of thought, of sensation, of feeling block up the avenues by which we can arrive at the perception that is needed. It is difficult afterwards because the faith, the surrender, the courage requisite in this path are not easy to the ego-clouded soul. The divine working is not the working which the egoistic mind desires or approves; for it uses error in order to arrive at truth, suffering in order to arrive at bliss, imperfection in order to arrive at perfection. The ego cannot see where it is being led; it revolts against the leading, loses confidence, loses courage. These failings would not matter; for the divine Guide within is not offended by our revolt, not discouraged by our want of faith or repelled by our weakness; he has the entire love of the mother and the entire patience of the teacher. But by withdrawing our assent from the guidance we lose the consciousness, though not all the actuality—not, in any case, the eventuality—of its benefit. And we withdraw our assent because we fail to distinguish our higher Self from the lower through which he is preparing his self-revelation. As in the world, so in ourselves, we cannot see God because of his workings and, especially, because he works in us through our nature and not by a succession of arbitrary miracles. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 62-63)

The surest way towards this integral fulfilment is to find the Master of the secret who dwells within us, open ourselves constantly to the divine Power which is also the divine Wisdom and Love and trust to it to effect the conversion.



## Faith and resistance

by the Mother

It has been a revolution in the atmosphere, that's why I am telling you about it. Because all the experiences described [in Savitri] are precisely the experiences I have. So then, suddenly, in the body ... I was over there in the music room, and H. was reading to me; then when she had finished reading, all of a sudden the body sat up straight in an aspiration and a prayer of such intensity! It was a dreadful anguish, you know: "See, the whole experience is here [in Mother], complete, total, perfect, and because this thing [the body] has lived too long, it no longer has the power of expression." And it said, "But why, Lord? Why, why do You take away from me the power of expression because this has lived too long?" It was a sort of revolution in the body's consciousness.

Things have been much better since, much better. There has been a decisive change.

You see, it was the exact description of the body's present state, yet it constantly feels fragile, in a precarious balance. And then, with all its aspiration, it said, "But WHY? Why?... See, the experience is all there—why isn't it expressed?"

As always (laughing), I had the feeling that the Lord was laughing and saying to me, "But since such is your will, it will be that way!" Meaning simply: it's you who *CHOSE* to be like that.

And it's perfectly true. All our incapacities, all our limitations, all our impossibilities, it's this idiotic Matter that chooses them all—not with intelligence, but with a sort of feeling that "that's how things must be," that they are "naturally" like that. An adherence—an idiotic adherence—to the mode of the lower nature.

Then there was laughter, tears, a whole revolution, and afterwards all was fine.

But nobody on earth will be able to convince me it isn't because this material nature chooses to be that way that it is that way.

And the Lord looks on, smiles, waits ... (laughing) for the body to be cured of its idiocy.

He does all that is needed, but ... we don't take any notice.

It's the trigger of FAITH that's not there, that famous faith Sri Aurobindo always mentions.

When people write me long letters (what letters I receive! laments all the time: my health is going wrong, my work is going wrong, my relationships are going wrong—laments all the time), and I always see, behind, that Consciousness, luminous, magnificent, marvelous—sun-filled, you know—exactly as if to say, "Whenever will you be cured of that mania!" The mania of the tragic and the lower.

Somewhere in the reason, one understands—it isn't that reason doesn't understand, but the reason has no power to make this matter obey.

And every minute, I have now the feeling of a choice between



victory and defeat, sun and shadow, harmony and disorder, the easy solution ... truly, the comfortable or pleasant and the unpleasant; and the feeling that if you don't intervene with authority, there's a sort of ... oh, it's a combination of cowardice and spinelessness: it's something limp—limp, you know, slack.

When I speak like this, it's very simple and it seems very easy, but EVERY MINUTE you are hanging between three possibilities (generally three) for the body: the fainting or the acute suffering, the indifferent, mechanical movement, or the glorious Mastery. And I am talking about washing your eyes, rinsing your mouth, doing any of those absolutely indifferent little things (in big things it always goes well because nature is in the habit of thinking that one should bear oneself "properly" to rise to the occasion—all that is ridiculous), but in little things, that's how it is. So the head whirls, and hup! ... And you can see—you can see with extreme precision—the three possibilities, and if you aren't constantly attentive (gesture of a closed fist, of authority and control), the physical nature, with such repulsive spinelessness, you know, absolutely disgusting, lets itself go.

This repeats itself hundreds upon hundreds of times a day.... So if this isn't called "sadhana," I don't know what a sadhana is! You see, eating is a sadhana, sleeping is a sadhana, washing is a sadhana, everything is a sadhana. What's a sadhana least of all is, for instance, receiving someone, because the body immediately keeps quite still—it calls the Lord and says, "Now be here," and then everything is fine (because it keeps still). The visitor comes, the body smiles, everything is fine—the Lord is there, so of course everything goes very smoothly. But when we're dealing with what we call "material" things, the things of daily life, it's hell, because of that idiot.

The other day, after you left, I couldn't eat anything! I couldn't eat because the body felt it was being diluted in the world like that (expansive gesture); so it was being diluted (which is quite all right, the experience is proceeding well), but it had a feeling that it couldn't eat—why? I don't know. And it was impossible. The doctor, who was there as always during my meals, said, "What's wrong?..." (Because the day before, there had been an attack, a sort of malice: I started vomiting; it happens to me once in six or seven years; an affair recurring at long intervals;



and it was serious, but it didn't last long.) But the other day it was something else: the body felt it was being diluted (you remember, you said I was white), and when it came to eating, the body said (in a moaning tone), "Look how I am, I can't eat." If I had had a little time (laughing), I would have given it a good smack and told it not to make such a fuss! But I didn't have time, it was time for me to sit down and eat—and I couldn't eat. So I had difficulty the whole day, because naturally those little pranks make life difficult.

But what to people is unconscious, what they don't understand or call "illness," is to me as clear as daylight; and it's always a CHOICE, there is always a choice every minute (for the material nature), and if the will isn't unshakable, if you aren't holding on to the higher Will with desperate and unrelenting eagerness, you let yourself go; and then the body becomes stupid: it faints, it has pains.... That same day when I couldn't eat (after lunch I always rest for some time to ... well, those are the hours when I put the body in direct reception of the Force—it doesn't last very long, I don't have much time), but as soon as I lay down on the chaise longue, such pains! Howling pains that take hold of you ... (gesture to the waist) at those spots that are open to the adverse attacks. I was lying down, but I was fully conscious then and I said to myself, "Oh, very well! You want to make a big scene.... All right, I will bear everything and I won't make a sound—and I won't budge, and you're going to keep still." Then I started repeating my mantra quietly, as though the body weren't in any pain. And after a while, the pain went away. The body saw it was no use, so it went away!

And I KNOW it's the same for everything, for all "illnesses," without exception. I see, I know the "origin" of illnesses, of the various disorders, all that is now crystal clear (it's a story that it could take hours and days to tell), and that's how it is. So when, in a more or less dogmatic or literary way, the sages say, "Disorder occurs because the nature has decided to be in disorder," it's not so silly.

It's ... oh, a spinelessness which is one of the things most contrary to the divine Glory. The spinelessness that accepts illness, you know. And I am saying this to my body, not to anyone else—others, that's not my business, it's their work, not mine; I mean, I am present [in them] only as the divine Consciousness, and then it's very easy, a very easy work; but the work here, the sadhana in here ...

But sick people ... when I tell them, "Be sincere," I know what I mean: if they REALLY want the Divine, all that must stop. That's all. I've made myself late again!

You know what's called self-pity? (Mother caresses her cheek) "Poor little thing, how you suffer! How you are to be pitied!" Well, the material nature is like that, it says, "I want to be like You, Lord; but then why do You leave me in this condition?"—a good slap and march! (*Mother's Agenda VI*, 8 May 1965)

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The resistance of inertia in consciousnesses and in Matter are the reason why that Action, instead of being direct and perfectly

harmonious, becomes confused, full of contradictions, shocks and conflicts. Instead of everything working out "normally," I might say, smoothly (as it should), all that resisting, opposing inertia causes things to start clashing together in a tangled movement, with disorder and destruction, which are made necessary only by the resistance but were NOT indispensable: they might not have been—they should not have been, to tell the truth. Because that Will, that Power, is a Power of perfect harmony in which each thing is in its place, and It organizes everything wonderfully: It comes as an absolutely luminous and perfect organization, which you can see when you have the vision. But when It descends and presses down on Matter, everything starts seething and resisting.

So to want to ascribe to the divine Action and the divine Power the disorder and confusion and destruction is yet more human nonsense. It's inertia (not to speak of ill will), it's inertia that CAUSES the catastrophe. It isn't that the catastrophe is willed, or even that it's foreseen: it is CAUSED by the resistance.

Then, added to this is the vision of the action of the Grace that comes and mitigates the results wherever possible, that is to say, wherever it's accepted. And that's what explains that the aspiration, the faith, the complete trust of the human, terrestrial element, have a power of harmonization, because they allow the Grace to come and mend the consequences of blind resistance.

It's a clear, very clear vision, clear even in the details.

If one wanted to, one could prophesy by telling what one sees. But there is a sort of supercompassion preventing that prophecy, because the Word of Truth has a power of manifestation, and to express the result of resistance would make that state more concrete and would lessen the action of the Grace. That's why even when one sees, one cannot speak, one MUST NOT speak.

But Sri Aurobindo certainly meant that this Power or this Force is what does everything—everything. When you see It or are one with It, at the same time you know, and you know that That is the only thing that really acts and creates; the rest is the result of the field or the world or the matter or the substance in which It acts—it's the result of resistance, but it's not the Action. And to unite with That means that you unite with the Action; to unite with what's below means that you unite with the resistance.

So then, because they fidget, stir, bustle, want to do this and that, think, make plans ... they imagine they're doing something (!)—they just resist. (*Mother's Agenda VII*, 9 July 1966)

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Wake up in yourself a will to conquer. Not a mere will in the mind but a will in the very cells of your body. Without that you can't do anything; you may take a hundred medicines but they won't cure you unless you have a will to overcome the physical illness.

I may destroy the adverse force that has possessed you. I may repeat the action a thousand times. But each time that a vacuum is created it will be filled up by one of the many forces that try to rush in. That is why I say, wake up the will to conquer. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 15, 1980/2004, p. 146)





## Poetry room

### Kingdoms of the greater knowledge<sup>1</sup>

In that high realm where no untruth can come,  
Where all are different and all is one,  
In the Impersonal's ocean without shore  
The Person in the World-Spirit anchored rode;  
It thrilled with the mighty marchings of World-Force,  
Its acts were the comrades of God's infinite peace.  
An adjunct glory and a symbol self,  
The body was delivered to the soul,—  
An immortal point of power, a block of poise  
In a cosmicity's wide formless surge,  
A conscious edge of the Transcendent's might  
Carving perfection from a bright world-stuff,  
It figured in it a universe's sense.  
There consciousness was a close and single weft;  
The far and near were one in spirit-space,  
The moments there were pregnant with all time.  
The superconscient's screen was ripped by thought,  
Idea rotated symphonies of sight,  
Sight was a flame-throw from identity;  
Life was a marvellous journey of the spirit,  
Feeling a wave from the universal Bliss.  
In the kingdom of the Spirit's power and light,  
As if one who arrived out of infinity's womb  
He came new-born, infant and limitless  
And grew in the wisdom of the timeless Child;  
He was a vast that soon became a Sun.  
A great luminous silence whispered to his heart;  
His knowledge an inview caught unfathomable,  
An outview by no brief horizons cut:  
He thought and felt in all, his gaze had power.  
He communed with the Incommunicable;  
Beings of a wider consciousness were his friends,  
Forms of a larger subtler make drew near;  
The Gods conversed with him behind Life's veil.  
Neighbour his being grew to Nature's crests.  
The primal Energy took him in its arms;  
His brain was wrapped in overwhelming light,  
An all-embracing knowledge seized his heart:  
Thoughts rose in him no earthly mind can hold,  
Mights played that never coursed through mortal nerves:  
He scanned the secrets of the Overmind,  
He bore the rapture of the Oversoul.  
A borderer of the empire of the Sun,  
Attuned to the supernal harmonies,  
He linked creation to the Eternal's sphere.  
His finite parts approached their absolutes,  
His actions framed the movements of the Gods,  
His will took up the reins of cosmic Force.

—Sri Aurobindo

### From The prelude<sup>2</sup>

Thus while the days flew by, and years passed on,  
From Nature and her overflowing soul  
I had received so much, that all my thoughts  
Were steeped in feeling; I was only then  
Contented, when with bliss ineffable  
I felt the sentiment of Being spread  
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;  
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought  
And human knowledge, to the human eye  
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;  
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,  
Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that glides  
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,  
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not  
If high the transport, great the joy I felt  
Communing in this sort through earth and heaven  
With every form of creature, as it looked  
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance  
Of adoration, with an eye of love.  
One song they sang, and it was audible,  
Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,  
O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain,  
Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed.  
—Of that external scene which round me lay,  
Little, in this abstraction, did I see;  
Remembered less; but I had inward hopes  
And swellings of the spirit, was rapt and soothed,  
Conversed with promises, had glimmering views  
How life pervades the undecaying mind;  
How the immortal soul with God-like power  
Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep  
That time can lay upon her; how on earth,  
Man, if he do but live within the light  
Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad  
His being armed with strength that cannot fail.

#### Visionary power

Attends the motions of the viewless winds,  
Embodied in the mystery of words:  
There, darkness makes abode, and all the host  
Of shadowy things work endless changes,—there,  
As in a mansion like their proper home,  
Even forms and substances are circumfused  
By that transparent veil with light divine,  
And, through the turnings intricate of verse,  
Present themselves as objects recognized,  
In flashes, and with glory not their own.

—William Wordsworth



### **My soul is filling with thy Light<sup>3</sup>**

My soul is filling with thy Light  
Slowly, a cup of marble-white  
Silences, dedicated to Thee,  
Brimming with wine of ecstasy.

Come into my bare solitude  
With rapture-wings divinely hued,  
O gold-bosomed celestial Bird,  
Whose intimate note from far has stirred

Within my hollow emptiness  
Resonance of a measureless  
Rhythm of creative diamond-fire  
Smitten from thy Vast's passion lyre.

My senses are sublimely tuned  
To thy immortal songs; they have swooned  
Into a sea of deathless trance  
Throbbing with thy rich utterance.

The night and day, like radiant dreams  
Of sun and stars and crescent beams  
Glowing with an eternal life  
On tree and desert and brazen cliff,

Bring to me a serene delight,  
Lifting each moment to the height  
Of a timeless God-enraptured view  
Haloed with luminous gold and blue.

New mysteries touch the unfathomed deep  
Where in a dark unconscious sleep  
Corals and pearls of vision lie  
Held in Time's hidden memory.

O high invisible spirit, come  
To end thy own earth-martyrdom  
And from the dragon clutch release  
Thy lost unborn immensities!

—Nirodbaran  
with Sri Aurobindo's corrections

### **The tribute<sup>4</sup>**

I would like to gather  
The charm and marvel  
Of all the flaming flowers,  
The enchantment of golden morns,  
The peace of pearly eves  
To offer at Thy Feet.

And all that is precious in life—  
A child's innocent smile,  
The nobility of a sage,  
The selflessness of the great  
And the ardour of the brave,  
I would bring to Thy altar.  
But all these forever belong to Thee.  
In this wide world  
Nothing is there, OSweet,  
That I may call mine.  
Sorely I am perplexed.  
What to bring  
As my adoration's joyous tribute?  
A small shade  
Of Thy perfections,  
I can offer Thee  
Only this temporal illusion  
Of a separate "I".

—Shyam Kumari

### **Greatest mystery<sup>5</sup>**

It is His greatest mystery  
That, being the Truth, still we  
Go struggling to be free.

We pray, we aspire,  
We tend the heavenly fire  
Which lifts us from the mire.

Through the light of an ardent flame  
We go past form and name  
And find the eye within  
There is no virtue, there is no sin,  
None that is ignorant, none that is wise  
—Each only His temporal disguise.

Then with stilled mind  
By His mercy we shall find  
What we thought far from us.  
It dwells in each self luminous  
But we seek it round and round,  
Dreaming ourselves forever bound.

Now the eye in wakeful trance  
From the peak where there's no fall  
Beholds His Splendour's dance  
And sees the One in the depths of all.

—Vikas Bamba



## From The World-Spirit<sup>6</sup>

Like soundless summer lightning seen afar,  
A halo o'er the grave of all mankind,  
O undefined dream-embosomed star,  
O charm of human love and sorrow twined:

Far, far away beyond the world's bright streams,  
Over the ruined spaces of the lands,  
Thy beauty, floating slowly, ever seems  
To shine most glorious; then from out our hands

To fade and vanish, evermore to be  
Our sorrow, our sweet longing sadly borne,  
Our incommunicable mystery  
Shrined in the soul's long night before the morn.

...

And yet, o'er all, the One through many seen,  
The phantom Presence moving without fail,  
Sweet sense of close-linked life and passion keen  
As of the grass waving before the gale.

What art Thou, O that wast and art to be?  
Ye forms that once through shady forest-glade  
Or golden light-flood wandered lovingly,  
What are ye? Nay, though all the past do fade  
Ye are not therefore perished, ye whom erst  
The eternal Spirit struck with quick desire,  
And led and beckoned onward till the first  
Slow spark of life became a flaming fire.

Ye are not therefore perished: for behold  
Today ye move about us, and the same  
Dark murmur of the past is forward rolled  
Another age, and grows with louder fame

Unto the morrow: newer ways are ours,  
New thoughts, new fancies, and we deem our lives  
New-fashioned in a mould of vaster powers;  
But as of old with flesh the spirit strives,

And we but head the strife. Soon shall the song  
That rolls all down the ages blend its voice  
With our weak utterance and make us strong;  
That we, borne forward still, may still rejoice,

Fronting the wave of change. Thou who alone  
Changeless remainest, O most mighty Soul,  
Hear us before we vanish! O make known  
Thyself in us, us in Thy living whole.

—Edward Carpenter

## Do you remember??

Do you remember the climb up the narrow twisting stairs?  
Do you remember waiting on the terrace above the tops of  
trees, clutching your bunch of flowers  
and listening to the sound, in winter,  
of the mumbling sea?  
Do you remember those noisy crows looking in her window?  
Do you remember then the call and the gesture and the  
open door and the room filled with light?  
Do you remember sometimes not even finding her for a  
moment in all that light?  
Do you remember the look? The investigations? Now then,  
she seemed to be saying, what have we  
got here. And then the reaching out...  
Do you remember her laughter, like ancient crystal bells?  
Do you remember your tears, happy as rainclouds?  
Do you remember her silences?  
Do you remember her "hey?" when you couldn't untangle  
your tongue?  
Do you remember the fragrance of her silver hands?  
Do you remember the touch, as gentle as a child's kiss?  
And do you remember her grip when she  
held you firm as the foundations  
of the universe?  
Do you remember the depths of her eyes?  
Do you remember the infallibility of her choice when  
she gave you back flowers? And when  
she gave you roses, do you remember  
the roses? O God, what roses!  
Do you remember the way she peeled your blessings  
packet from the bundle as if they  
were the Lord's rupee notes?  
Do you remember leaving, and her crisp and clean  
formidable strength going out with you?  
And do you remember promising yourself that this time,  
this time, you would keep her with you  
for ever...  
Do you remember?

—Norman Thomas (Navoditte)

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## Apropos

This I have seen that whatever God has withheld from me, He withheld in His love and wisdom. Had I grasped it then, I would have turned some great good into a great poison. Yet sometimes when we insist, He gives us poison to drink that we may learn to turn from it and taste with knowledge His ambrosia and His nectar. —Sri Aurobindo.

You are bathed in all kinds of things—good, bad, neutral, luminous, dark; it's all there, and each one's consciousness should, in principle, act as a filter. You should receive only what you want to receive, you should think only what you want to think; and then, you should not allow these thoughts to be changed into feelings and actions without formal authorization. —The Mother

The only true liberty is in the service of that which is beyond all limits, beyond all definitions, beyond all human appreciation: that which is All, and which therefore is no limited or individual thing: The All is no-thing, for if it were to be a single thing separated from all other things, it would not be All. —Thomas Merton

Her heart is full of joy with love, for in the Lord her mind is stilled. She has renounced every selfish attachment and draws abiding joy and strength from the One within. She lives not for herself, but lives to serve the Lord of Love in all, and swims across the sea of life breasting its rough waves joyfully. —Saint Teresa of Avila

We are members of a vast cosmic orchestra in which each living instrument is essential to the complementary and harmonious playing of the whole. —J. Allen Boone

Let me seek, then, the gift of silence, and poverty, and solitude where everything I touch is turned into a prayer: where the sky is my prayer, the birds are my prayer, the wind in the trees is my prayer, for God is all in all. —Thomas Merton

He travels with whoever looks for Him, and having taken the seeker by the hand, He arouses him to go in search of himself. —Al-Ansari

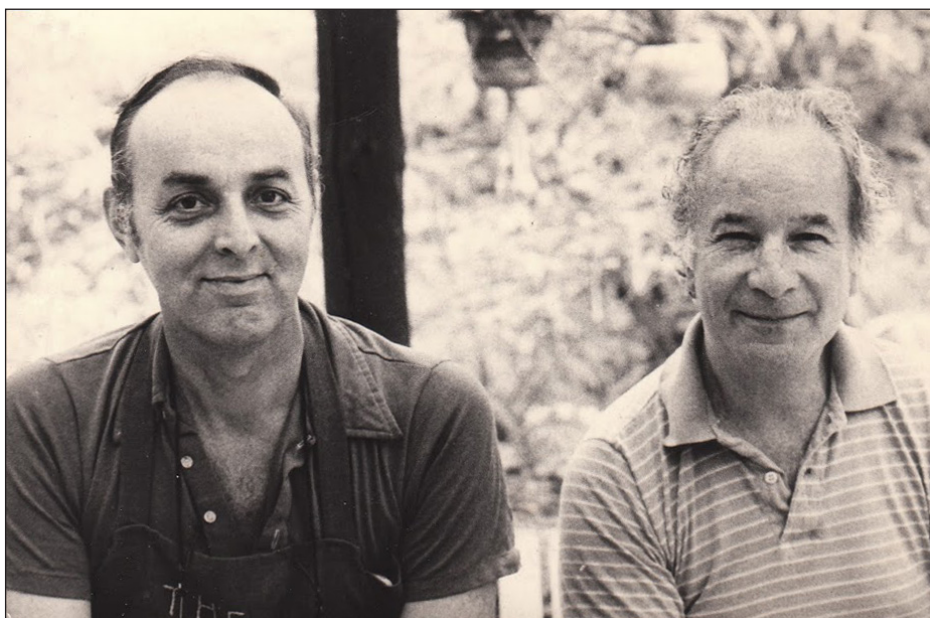
This morning, as I kindle the fire on my hearth, I pray that the flame of God's love may burn in my heart and in the hearts of all I meet today. I pray that no envy or malice, no hatred or fear, may smother the flame. I pray that indifference and apathy, contempt and pride, may not pour like cold water on the fire. Instead, may the spark of God's love light the love in my heart, that it may burn brightly through the day. And may I warm those who are lonely, whose hearts are cold and lifeless, so that all may know the comfort of God's love. —From the Gaelic tradition

Lord, where shall I find you? Your place is lofty and secret. And where shall I not find you? The whole earth is full of your glory! You are found in our innermost heart, yet you fixed earth's boundaries. You are a strong tower for those who are near and the trust of those who go far. I have sought to come near you; I have called to you with all my heart; and when I went out towards you, I found you coming towards me. —Judah Halevi

Adorable presence, Thou who art within and without, above and below and all around, Thou who art interpenetrating every cell of my being, Thou who art the eye of my eyes, the ear of my ears, the heart of my heart, the mind of my mind, the breath of my breath, the life of my life, the soul of my soul, Bless us, dear God, to be aware of thy presence now and here. May we all be aware of thy presence in the East and the West, in the North and the South. May peace and good will abide among individuals, communities, and nations. —Swami Omkar

The best act of worship is watchfulness of the moments. That is, that the servant not look beyond his limit, and not contemplate anything other than his Lord, and not associate with anything other than his present moment. —Abu Bakr Muhammad Al-Wasiti

A mind that has come to the stillness of wisdom shall know being, shall know what it is to love. Love is neither personal nor impersonal. Love is love, not to be defined or described by the mind as exclusive or inclusive. Love is its own eternity; it is the real, the supreme, the immeasurable. —Aldous Huxley



*Eric Hughes and Sam Spanier, founders and residents of Matagiri since 1968 until their passings in 2016 and 2008, respectively. (Photo courtesy Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center)*