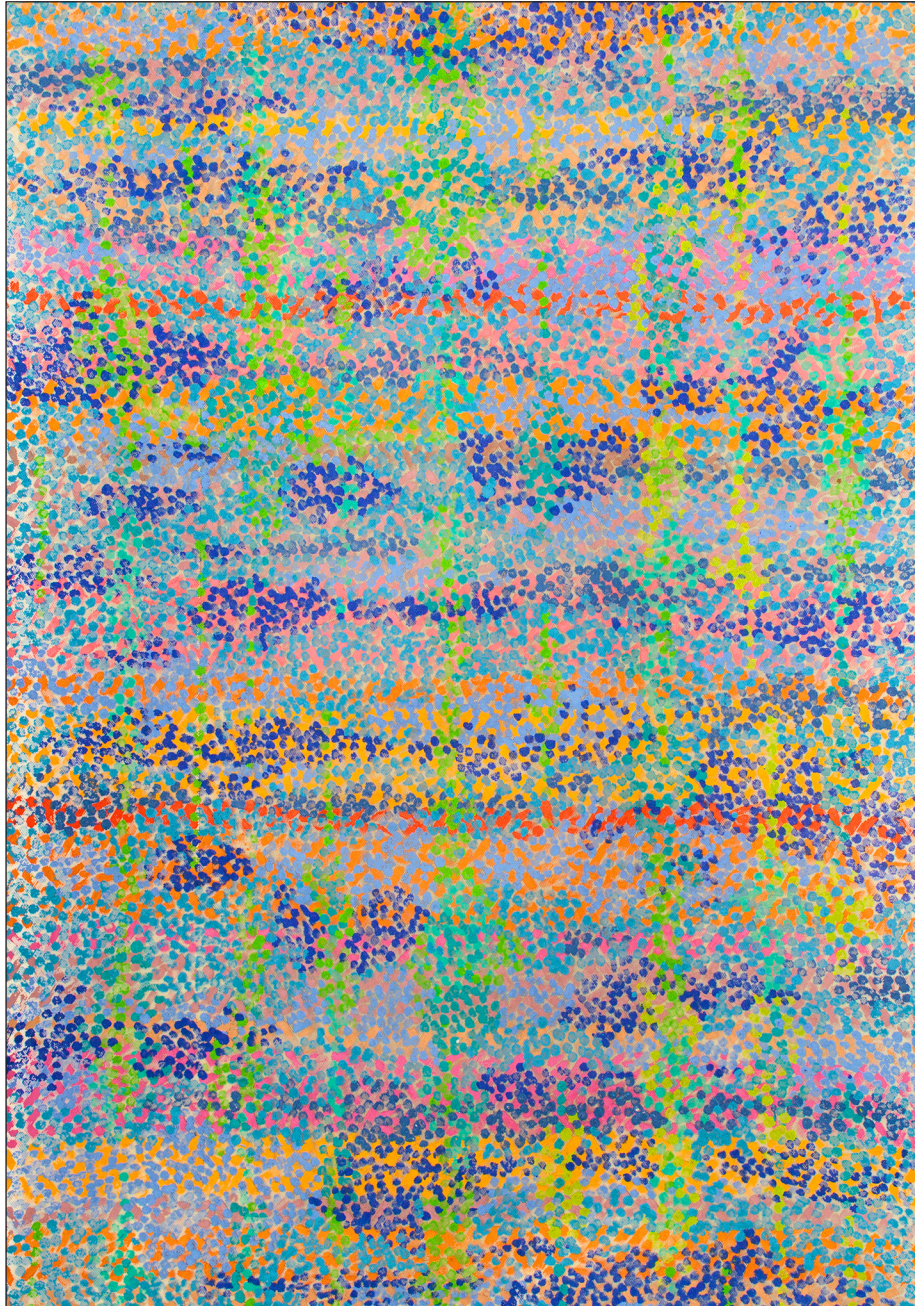


Collaboration

Fall 2016

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 41, No. 2



Richness of the Integral Yoga by Martha Orton •
The three sisters by Michael Miovic •
Aids and obstacles in Integral Yoga sadhana by Bahman Shirazi •
On the *Record of Yoga* by Lopa Muckerjee •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry room • Apropos



About the art on the front and back cover

Paintings by Pierre Legrand of Auroville. Pierre explains, "You discover some interesting things when you join the Auroville adventure. For example: the Mother said, 'You want terrestrial results? Well, become conscious of your cells. Very small things, movements of consciousness in Matter, truly astounding. Only if you observe in a most tenuous way do you notice them.' (*Mother's Agenda*, 20 November 1963). It was only after a drastic experience at this 'tenuous level' that I felt the need to explore it through Art... For some reason I have been drawn to a very specific path among the infinite possibilities offered by contemporary art. I focused on the concept of 'field painting'—which has no composition, no up, no down, sometimes even no recto or verso! It allowed pure vibratory fields and seemed to me the most appropriate way to 'catch' these experiences." For more information visit www.pierrelegrand.in or read the book *Light Matter: Atelier Pierre Legrand* available from amazon.in.

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.

Clifford Bax (1886–1962) was a versatile English writer, known particularly as a playwright, a journalist, critic and editor, and a poet.

Ellen Mary Clerke (1840–1906) was an Irish author, journalist, poet and popular science writer in the field of astronomy.

Rod Hemsell (rodhemsell@yahoo.com) is an American Aurovilian who for many years has hosted Savitri Immersion workshops at the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center in Crestone, CO.

Sandy Kepler (cultural fellowship@sbcglobal.net) is the coordinator for the Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco.

Santosh Krinsky (santoshk@msn.com) is the founder of Lotus Press, and the President of the Institute for Wholistic Education in Wilmot, WI.

Michael Miovic (mmiovic@yahoo.com) is interested in integral psychology, geo-spiritual studies, and writing. He works as a consultation-liaison psychiatrist in Edina, MN.

Lopa Mukherjee (lopa.mukherjee0@gmail.com) is the author of three books on Indian culture and spirituality. She is also a senior software engineer in Silicon Valley.

Martha Orton (morton@gmail.com), is a clinical social worker and Sri Aurobindo devotee, scholar and author living in Charlottesville, VA.

Bahman Shirazi (bshirazi@ciis.edu) is a faculty member of the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco in Integral Psychology.

Themis (deceased), a long-time member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, was a poet and translator.

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From the office of Collaboration

We begin this issue with news from several of the Sri Aurobindo Centers in the USA: The Institute for Wholistic Education in Racine, WI, the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center in Crestone, CO, and the Cultural Integral Fellowship in San Francisco, CA. In Briefs we note Debashish Banerji's new appointment at the California Institute of Integral Studies, and a fund-raising campaign by the Sri Aurobindo Yoga Foundation of North America for the further development of an excellent resource, the website: <www.motherandsriaurobindo.in>.

In AV almanac, we have an excellent article by Alan of *Auroville Today* on the housing crisis in Auroville. The article shows that while the crisis may be easing with numerous new building projects, basic underlying causes remain to be addressed.

In the Salon, Martha Orton writes about the "Richness of the Integral Yoga." She describes how the acceptance and integration of matter and spirit in the Integral Yoga, and its triple path of karma yoga, jnana yoga, and bhakti yoga, provides the opportunity for an extraordinary beauty and richness of spiritual living, as well as for creativity and art.

Essays starts with an entertaining fictional story by Michael Miovic—a black comedy—called "The Three Sisters," who go by the nicknames 'Night', 'Murder', and 'Chaos'. Their mother, called the 'First Mother', is exceptionally gracious and loving, despite the intrigues of her children. There are a few surprises in the story, and we alert the reader that you may find yourself laughing out loud when reading this.

The second Essay, by Bahman Shirazi, summarizes important aids and obstacles in Integral Yoga based on quotes from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Bahman introduces the subject with some basic principles of the Yoga, and categorizes the aids and obstacles into three basic yet overlapping aspects or phases of the sadhana.

The third Essay, by Lopa Mukherjee, is called *On the Record of Yoga*. Lopa takes us through some of the important siddhis or spiritual and occult attainments that Sri Aurobindo was developing in his early spiritual practice while recording his progress in his personal diary. Lopa has selected illustrative quotes to explain the nature of many of the various siddhis and the methods that Sri Aurobindo used to develop them. She concludes with a brief account of the Mother's own development and practice of occultism, and cautions about the possible perils of occult practices.

In Source Material, as a non-fictional complement to Michael's fictional story, I have selected important passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother about the powers of darkness, the Asuras, and their role in the world and its spiritual evolution.

We close the issue with a selection of elevating spiritual poetry and spiritual quotations. Two abstract works of art by Aurovilian Pierre Legrand add color to our front and back covers, and quotes by Pierre on pages 2-3 explain his approach.

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* for the Salon section. As with other articles submitted to *Collaboration*, the editor may require or suggest changes 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*. For the next issue, please email your essay to the editor at: editor@collaboration.org by December 1, 2016.

The artist

Born in Paris, an engineer by profession, Pierre Legrand's (anu@auroville.org.in) artistic journey began after coming to India in 1968. Legrand's work took off with the invention of a coded script, in an effort to understand the mystery of being human from the cellular level, that in innermost core where the material and the spiritual can impact each other...

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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; 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

Sri Aurobindo Learning Center

by Rod Hemsell

Institute for Wholistic Education

by Santosh Krinsky

The Institute for Wholistic Education, in collaboration with Lotus Press (www.lotuspress.com), is continuing its development and publishing of study guides for Sri Aurobindo's major writings, as well as development of e-books for a variety of platforms.

Most of the major works of Sri Aurobindo are now available as e-books on a wide variety of e-book platforms including Amazon Kindle, Apple I-Tunes, KOBO, Barnes & Noble Nook, and Google Play. We have been also adding steadily to the selection of books by M.P. Pandit on these platforms, and are currently finalizing the *Commentaries on the Mother's Ministry* (4 volumes) and *Yoga of Transformation*.

Daily blog posts advancing the readings in Sri Aurobindo's major works continue. The current book of Sri Aurobindo's being focused on is *The Synthesis of Yoga*, with daily posts at <http://sriarobindostudies.wordpress.com>. Currently we are just beginning Part 4, The Yoga of Self-Perfection, of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. All prior posts remain archived and accessible for those who want to study earlier chapters, as well as any of the earlier volumes in the series. This section will be sent for publication as the last of four volumes on the *Readings in Sri Aurobindo's The Synthesis of Yoga* by the end of August 2017. Volume 1 of this series, focusing on The Yoga of Knowledge is now published and in print. Volumes 2 (The Yoga of Works) and 3 (The Yoga of Love and Devotion) are being prepared for publication to appear before end of 2016 in print. Any center in the USA which has not yet requested and received their free copies for any of these ten volumes should contact us at santoshk@msn.com

Lotus Press, in collaboration with the East West Cultural Center (Los Angeles), also is distributing the writings of Dr. Judith Tyberg (Jyoti Priya): *Language of the Gods*, and *First Lessons in Sanskrit Grammar and Reading*.

The Institute has sponsored various meditation gatherings on Darshan Days throughout 2016. The Institute also sponsors regular classes on reiki, levels 1, 2 and 3, conducted by Karuna Krinsky. The schedule is regularly updated and can be found at www.reikiteacher.org. Contact the Institute for Wholistic Education at 3425 Patzke Lane, Racine, WI 53405; ph. 262-619-1798; <www.wholisticinstitute.org>.

The annual Savitri Immersion Workshop, led by Rod Hemsell, was held this year from August 14-19, with 22 participants, including 11 from out-of-state, four of whom were here for the first time and travelled from as far away as New York and Virginia. Fortunately the season of dry heat and mosquitoes had passed and everyone could enjoy the pleasant high-altitude Colorado climate. Another workshop, held just eight months ago during the winter season, was similarly blessed with our famous white landscapes and sunny days. Both Immersions consisted of deep plunges into *Savitri*, accompanied by intense thematic contexts—the one in December focusing on the experience of death, in both *Savitri* and Tibetan Buddhist teachings, and the recent one on the Yoga Siddhis in the Saptā Chatusthaya text [the *Record of Yoga*].

At both retreats there were also the usual art workshops, mountain hikes, hot springs bathing, and plenty of good food to relieve the sore-butt syndrome that accompanies several hours of sitting in the solar dome every day—a profound experience for everyone in more ways than one.

Dr. Eric Weiss has conducted a weekly study group in *The Synthesis of Yoga* here, for the past six months, and some followers from other locations are able to connect on-line using the Zoom platform. The Immersion Workshops are also recorded and available for download from Hightail.com. Anyone interested may contact Rod at: <rodhemsell@yahoo.com>.

Aided by grants from Foundation for World Education and Tong Schraa Liu Partners, Netherlands, the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center and the University of Human Unity project in Auroville co-sponsored a very successful three-day seminar on the 'Integral Paradigm of Knowledge' in February in Auroville this year, and all of the presentations can be viewed on the University of Human Unity website.

Each of these activities represents the fulfillment of the mission of the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center Foundation which is an educational trust dedicated to furthering the study of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the development of Auroville. For more information and on-going activities, please visit our website at <sriarobindolc.org>.

Cultural Integration Fellowship

by Sandy Kepler

The Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF) continues its yearly August programming honoring Integral Yoga.



Debashish Banerji, PhD gave a talk entitled: “Shastra, Guru or Intuition: The Question of Guidance in Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga” in honor of Sri Aurobindo’s birthday.

Other August topics at CIF included the following: “Sri Aurobindo in Baroda” by Kundan Singh, PhD; “An Alchemy of Heaven on Nature’s Base: The Divine Syzygy in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother” by Stephen Julich, PhD; and “Integral Yoga in the 21st Century” by Brant Cortright, PhD.

CIF was also honored this month by a visit from Mrs. Kavery Nadamangalam who is a leader at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Bangalore, India. Kavery is in the Bay Area visiting her daughter, Mallika Sankaran.

Sri Aurobindo devotee, Sri Karunamayee, a resident of the Sri Aurobindo New Delhi Ashram, will give a vocal concert offering at CIF in honor of Mahatma Gandhi’s birthday this October 2. She will be accompanied by tabla maestro, Vishal Nagar, and singers and musicians from Sur Laya Sangam, headquartered in Albany, CA.

Briefs

Dr. Debashish Banerji has been appointed Haridas Chaudhuri Professor of Indian Philosophies and Cultures and Doshi Professor of Asian Art at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco, beginning this fall semester. We are all grateful Dr. Chaudhuri’s legacy and Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga will continue to be a strong presence at CIIS with Dr. Banerji’s teaching and leadership of the department, the founding core of CIIS.

The Sri Aurobindo Yoga Foundation of North America (SAYFNA) has inaugurated a fund raising campaign to further the work of the most comprehensive website dedicated to the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, <<http://www.motherandsriaurobindo.in>>. According to its mission statement, “This website is a place of peace, harmony and love, above all conflicts and disagreements. It is a collective effort of many souls united in their aspiration and devotion to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the Supramental Force which they have brought down and is now in the process of transforming this earthly life to a life divine.” The fund raising campaign is primarily to urgently upgrade the entire system, purchase new equipment, employ people to scan dozens of books (45 books by Amal Kiran alone!), proof-read, and more. An additional programmer is also needed for more improvements to the site.

If you look at the website you will see that it is very user friendly with the finest search engine available. It contains the works of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, all the Ashram and Corner house messages, Darshan messages, information about

Auroville and the Ashram, the complete works of the eldest disciples, videotaped interviews with many other disciples and devotees, information from Centers around the world, the OM Choir, a series of videos “Explorations in Savitri” with Dr. Alok Pandey, and a ‘Contact us’ section where all kinds of questions are answered.

SAYFNA aspires to raise more than \$25,000 to be able to receive a one-time Foreign Contribution Reserve Approval. All donations regardless of size are humbly accepted with gratitude. SAYFNA is a non-profit Sri Aurobindo Center and all donations from the US are 100% tax deductible. Contact Vivek at: sinhavi@yahoo.com

AV almanac

The housing crisis

by Alan

Reprinted with permission from Auroville Today, June-July 2016

Two of the major challenges facing the community at present are a fragile economy and a severe lack of low-priced accommodation. Clearly, the two are inter-linked. However, while the economy has faced serious stresses in the past—the decision of the Sri Aurobindo Society to cut off funding to the community in the mid 1970s precipitated our first economic crisis—the housing crisis has crept up on us. In the early years, finding accommodation was not difficult. The accommodation tended to be very simple, but this was the ethos of those times, and nobody seemed to feel disadvantaged living in a temporary ‘capsule’ under keet.

Of course, there were also more ‘luxurious’ houses in places like Certitude and Auromodele, but this form of permanent housing did not become the norm until the late 1980s, when settlements like Samasti and Surrender began to be built. This coincided with a new push to build the city, and Auroville’s town planning service underlined the new approach by forbidding new keet constructions in the city.

Inevitably, the costs of constructing accommodation rose steeply. This had a number of consequences. As most individuals had to pay substantial amounts for ‘their’ houses, it encouraged a more ‘proprietary’ attitude, and the ability of Aurovilians to move freely between houses and communities, which had been a feature of the early days, disappeared almost completely. Again, the increased time it took to build a ‘pukka’ house (a keet capsule could be put up in a week; new houses



took a minimum of 6–9 months) as well as a more complicated process for getting construction permission meant that less accommodation was being built, even though the population continued to grow.

The housing squeeze had begun

In 1995, the first Newcomer units were built. While Newcomers could officially only live in these units for a maximum of two years, it gave them a breathing space to explore the community and find ways to resolve the accommodation challenge.

However, there were never enough units and it did not solve the underlying accommodation problem, which was a mismatch between the quantity and types of accommodation available and the financial resources of many Aurovilians and Newcomers.

To underline this, the present price of a studio apartment in new developments is around 20 lakhs rupees (\$30,000), which rises to between 38–54 lakhs for a 3 bedroom apartment. Today, only six Newcomers can afford a house above 20 lakhs, and none of these are young people. One consequence is that out of 71 Newcomer units, 47 (64%) are occupied at present by people who did not move out when they became Aurovilians because they could not find another place to live.

An Aurovilian recently made a calculation of how long it would take a young prospective Newcomer living in France to save 20 lakhs, which is the minimum price for many current housing projects. The answer? Eleven years. Actually, it would take quite a lot longer because this optimistically assumes the young person on a basic salary could save 200 Euros a month, and 20 lakhs does not include the cost of a visa, plane ticket and all the initial expenses associated with living in Auroville. These can be quite steep, which is why 20% of Newcomers over the past three years have left Auroville because they were unable to find work to support themselves.

But the accommodation problem does not just impact Newcomers. At present, 95 adults and 52 youth are on a waiting list for housing. Many of these do not have sufficient funds to 'buy' the housing on offer.

The housing squeeze is amplified by the fact that people without adequate resources continue to join the community (this year, there will be forty new people joining Auroville who have limited funds for accommodation), and by the fact that housing tastes have changed. Keet constructions are now allowable once again in the city area, but there is hardly any demand for them as many people now prefer a higher standard of accommodation that, inevitably, is more costly.

The Entry and Housing Services are the most exercised by this issue. One of the conditions specified by the Entry Service in the past for becoming an Aurovilian was that a Newcomer

should have found permanent housing within Auroville. But this has become increasingly difficult, both because of the lack of available housing and because some Newcomers who initially declared they had money for housing declare, after a year of living here, they have no more resources or no longer want to invest in housing. A few years ago, the situation was so bad that the Entry Service decided to 'close' Auroville for some time to new applicants because there was insufficient housing (The new Entry Policy, see *Auroville Today* no. 322, no longer specifies an automatic linkage between having housing and becoming an Aurovilian, but it is still unclear how this will be worked out in practice.)

It's a quandary. Auroville wants to develop, and to do this it requires many more young people, but they cannot pay the costs of the new houses or many existing ones. In fact, we are creating a situation where only people of a certain economic level (which generally means middle-aged or older) can join the community, while Newcomers and volunteers are pushed to seek cheaper accommodation in the surrounding villages.

The response

Of course, attempts have been made to find solutions. For example, the number of Newcomer units have increased. There have also been Government of India funded projects, like Inspiration, that have allowed the community to provide free accommodation to some Aurovilians. Meanwhile, Mitra Hostel provides low-priced accommodation for volunteers and interns. Other projects, like the Botanical Gardens, also provide simple accommodation for volunteers who work there.

There has also been an experiment in which the Housing Service rented a guest house outside Auroville to provide temporary accommodation for Newcomers and volunteers. However, this was not successful.

Then there are experiments in low-cost 'demountable' housing. These include La Maison des Jeunes (see *Auroville Today* no. 307) and the Pony Farm experiment, where six temporary housing units have been constructed by the Housing Service at a unit cost of between 3–10 lakhs [\$4500–\$15,000]. Also, two new plots for low-cost housing have recently been approved by L'Avenir where semi-permanent housing will be provided for fifteen individuals and six families.

At the same time, there have been various attempts to control housing costs. For example, the Housing Service attempts to lower the cost price of units by serving as the project holder for some projects as well as by directly employing an architect who works for a maintenance rather than for a percentage of the total cost. Also, the 10% house contribution to the Fraternity Fund (levied on the total cost of the construction) has been lowered to 9%, with 0% contribution for constructions that cost less than Rs 18,000 per square metre.



New housing developments

Status	Apartments
Sacred Groves (new community) under construction	20 (1st phase)
Sanjana (new community) under construction	21
Sunship (new community) under construction	42
Invocation (extension) completion within 1 year	12
Swayam (extension) completed	8
Kalpana (new community) starting phase	43
Serenity (new community) starting phase	12
Courage 3 (extension) completion in 3 months	6
Humanscapes (new community) under construction	38 (1st phase)
Pony Farm (extension) completed	6

In addition, there are two more projects in the pipeline for staff quarters by SAIIR in the Cultural Zone.

New low-cost apartments of the Maison des Jeunes type are also happening in the International Zone and further low-cost housing projects are planned in the Greenbelt, Reve area and International Zone. There is also a project for a Home for Assisted living (for senior citizens) next to Arka with eight apartments planned for the first phase.

Meanwhile, of the 186 new housing units slated to be completed between 2016–2018, 52 will be either provided free or subsidized by the project holder or the Government of India. These include 36 units for young people in the first phase of the Humanscape project. There is also the possibility that two 100-bed hostels will be constructed with government funding for young people.

All this would appear to be radically easing the housing situation. However, there has been criticism regarding the quality of some of the housing projects (see *Auroville Today* 319) and the high maintenance costs they may incur. Then again, as many of the planned new apartments will be high-cost (in the range of 20–45 lakhs [\$30,000–\$67,250]), even the provision of partial subsidies will put them out of the reach of many Aurovilians and Newcomers.

What has to change?

Clearly, adequate housing needs to be provided for everybody who wants to put their energy into the Auroville project, irrespective of their financial status. But how?

The mandate of the Housing Service includes providing decent housing for Aurovilians and Newcomers but it does not receive sufficient funds from the community to do this. With its present budget, it can only repair and maintain existing housing: it cannot provide any new accommodation. Given the present costs of housing in Auroville, its present annual budget of 34 lakhs [\$50,800] would have to be greatly increased for it to begin doing this.



Conceptual designs of the cost-effective Humanscapes project (above) and the more expensive Kalpana apartments (below).

Other funding possibilities include units which have spare resources allocating them for housing the Aurovilians or Newcomers working there, or allocating a portion of the funds the community receives from the Government of India for housing, or even taking banking loans to construct much needed accommodation (see accompanying interview with Hemant).

Of course, reducing the costs of building should also be seen as a priority. Here more encouragement should be given to architects to experiment with cost-effective housing rather than designing expensive, prestige projects. Other ways of reducing costs could include setting up a centralized Auroville purchasing service for all construction projects; creating an Auroville architects service where architects work for a maintenance rather than a percentage of the overall cost of the project; and employing volunteers and Newcomers/Aurovilians in construction rather than outside external labour.

It has to be said, however, that creating an architects' service and employing volunteers or build-your-own enthusiasts has already been experimented with, but with little success.

Team member Sauro points out that while L'Avenir does support low-cost and innovative housing projects, he is not convinced that low-cost housing is a long-term solution, partly because it may incur higher maintenance costs in the long run.

Moreover, as Sonja from Housing Service points out, some people do not want low-cost housing. "Many Newcomers and Aurovilians want single standing houses with at least a quarter acre of garden around. This is what they see old-timers have and what they feel is now the norm."



Salon

Richness of the Integral Yoga

Martha Orton

Sri Aurobindo, in his great realization of the true and complete integral reality of the Divine, has told us that “All life is yoga.”²¹ We see this very vividly in his conceptualization of the Triune Path of the integral yoga as explained in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Sri Aurobindo explains that the paths of knowledge, works and devotion all merge and become one. Wherever one begins one’s quest for the Divine, ultimately each of these three paths become involved. This occurs in a dynamic process of interaction and in-terplay of the various aspects of human nature and, of course, by the Grace of the Divine and His willingness to offer Himself and engage in intimate relationship with humanity.

The triune path

The spiritual seeker may begin with the discovery of the Integral Yoga at the intellectual level, perhaps through reading an inspiring text by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. While this may indicate that the individual is going to pursue the path of knowledge, jnana yoga, the result may instead lead to an initial emphasis on bhakti or karma yoga. The particular nature of the individual tends to determine one’s direction and also one’s progress. Inevitably individuals gravitate to the initial path which best suits who and what they are within themselves. In that way, the Integral Yoga is highly accessible to all who are called to it. The seeker can begin from where he or she is in terms of personality, interest, and specific capabilities. Sri Aurobindo explains that if the seeker begins with jnana yoga, seeking knowledge of the Divine, this inevitably leads to devotion and love for the Divine, bhakti yoga, and then the inspiration to offer all one’s life and work to the Divine, karma yoga. Beginning with bhakti yoga inevitably leads to offering one’s life and works to the Divine, karma yoga, and also knowledge of the Divine, jnana yoga, through the intimacy that develops. Inevitably karma yoga leads to both knowledge of and devotion for the Divine. Consequently, all life, work, aspiration, prayer in all their forms can be, and for many truly are, part of their sadhana. This includes artistic expression, which can have a rich role to play in spiritual development. We can see this in light of Sri Aurobindo’s perspective on reality and also as he himself has described its significance.

In any case, there are limits on how much the cost of construction can be lowered. Construction costs have soared all over India in the past 25 years, which is why Sauro believes that the real solution to our housing problem lies in strengthening the Auroville economy. Clearly, a weak economy impacts the housing situation. For example, potential accommodation for young people without resources is being converted by some Aurovilians into rented accommodation as a means of supplementing their income.

And then there is the question of where to build. There is not much scope for lower-cost experimentation in the city at the present, where the main emphasis is upon constructing more apartment buildings, although L’Avenir has recently allocated two city sites for such experimentation.

Proponents of more affordable housing want new areas opened up—for example on land that needs protection from encroachment—where experimentation in constructing simpler forms of accommodation can take place.

Ideally, of course, there would be proximity to existing infrastructure for this would lower costs. In this context, building in existing communities would seem an obvious option. However, of the 169 communities of Auroville, it seems that only four (Samasti, Fraternity, Auromodele and Aspiration) welcome new people to build. And when existing accommodation does fall vacant in a community, many communities impose restrictions like no children, no pets or, as in some greenbelt communities, a need to be engaged in a specific work.

And here we approach the core of the problem. For while it is easy to blame the administrative troika of the Entry Service, Housing Service and L’Avenir for the present housing difficulties, we all have some responsibility for the situation. Whether it is individuals refusing to allow somebody to build in their community, or fencing off acres around their house, or converting rooms for high rent, or keeping their accommodation vacant while they are away for long periods of time; or architects and contractors favouring expensive, high-end projects; or the Auroville community failing to prioritise the need for affordable housing by putting significant resources towards achieving this, the undeniable consequence is that we are making it harder and harder for young people with energy and idealism, but with limited means, to join this community.

Perhaps the real question is whether we want new people at all. But if we are serious about building this city, all of us will be asked to let go of something—of proprietorial attitudes to ‘our’ houses and estates, of planning dogmas, architectural egos, or buffer funds put aside for a ‘rainy day’ etc.—in order to create space for new energy and new ideas.

Only then can we begin actively working towards the day when the community will provide all housing free, on the basis of need, for all those who want to give their energy to the manifestation of Mother’s Auroville.



Beauty and richness in spiritual life

In his writings on the Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo has contradicted the often-held ascetic view of spiritual life. In doing so he asserts a vastly comprehensive perspective on Brahman, in which the Divine is truly All and All is Divine, including both matter and spirit. He has identified and discussed the virtues of both the ascetic and materialist perspectives in *The Life Divine* and informs us of how these have significant and direct relation to our approach to life in the world and, most certainly, to sadhana. Sri Aurobindo considers the materialist perspective, in which only the material world is regarded as real, as having benefited humanity by helping to dispel superstition and encouraging rational thought and inquiry. This has led to significant scientific advances, for example, which have been of great help to humanity, increasing our knowledge of material phenomena and our ability to cope with this level of reality. Yet there is an emptiness in its not recognizing dimensions beyond the material. To the extent that the ascetic perspective, the mystic view which regards only the spirit as real, considers the world to be unreal and an illusion, Sri Aurobindo describes this as resulting in neglect of the physical world and life within it, consequently leading to degradation of life on the material plane. He also explains that the mystic or spiritual seeker who has experience of the Absolute can become so absorbed in this realization that he or she comes to consider only this to be real. High spiritual experience can result in all lesser consciousness, and the things associated with it, appearing to be unreal and inconsequential. Yet, most importantly, the ascetic perspective acknowledges the truth of the Divine Spirit. Consequently each of these two apparently opposite perspectives has both advantages and disadvantages, and each contains elements of truth. In his vast wisdom, Sri Aurobindo creates a new synthesis of the two in an integral perspective which incorporates the strengths of both.

In Sri Aurobindo's view of reality both matter and spirit are real. Moreover, both are divine. This conclusion derives directly from his completely comprehensive perspective on Brahman. Therefore, instead of understanding Brahman as "the One without a second" to mean that there is only the Spirit, all else is unreal, Sri Aurobindo understands this statement to mean that there is nothing but the Divine, everything is contained within the Divine—matter, spirit—everything.

This all-encompassing perspective gives rise to limitless opportunities in karma yoga, wherein all our life and work, every one of our endeavors, can be part of sadhana, with the potential of their being truly and fully offered to the Divine. The vestiges of asceticism may influence the spiritual seeker to focus on practical, pragmatic aspects of karma yoga and to regard artistic expression as extravagant and unnecessary. (This is sometimes particularly the case for those with a Chris-

tian Protestant background.) Asceticism, in its austerity and concentration on a spiritual goal, tends to turn its face away from the beauty, richness and joy of the Divine as manifested in life on the material plane. Necessarily, such a stance is contradictory to Sri Aurobindo's view. Sri Aurobindo makes a direct association of beauty with the Divine, for example in *Savitri*, he has written:

A Nature lifted by a larger breath,
Plastic and passive to the all-shaping Fire,
Answers the flaming Godhead's casual touch:
Immune from our inertia of response
It hears the words to which our hearts are deaf,
Adopts the seeing of immortal eyes
And, traveler of the roads of line and hue,
Pursues the spirit of beauty to its home.
Thus we draw near to the All-Wonderful
Following his rapture in things as sign and guide;
Beauty is his footprint showing us where he has passed,
Love is his heart-beats' rhythm in mortal breasts,
Happiness the smile on his adorable face.²

In this extraordinary passage, Sri Aurobindo tells us that the very presence of the Divine results in beauty. The Divine has created the virtually unfathomable beauty of the natural world, the cosmos and also whatever exists that we are not cognizant of that lies beyond. Beauty is a characteristic of the Divine, inextricably associated with Him. Consequently in our quest to reveal our innate divinity as we progress and evolve through sadhana, the expression and appreciation of beauty is part of this process. This can take many forms, such as love and appreciation for the world as the creation of the Divine, the beauty and richness of the love in our hearts, the beauty of our caring actions in the world, and also the beauty and abundant richness manifested through human life and its various forms of expression.

Humanity is able to contain and manifest beauty and richness in life because of its innate divinity, since we are created by the Divine and truly created from Himself, with a spark of the Divine at our core. Sri Aurobindo explains that this spark, the psy-chic being, is our small part of pure divinity, of the very Divine Himself. Through life experiences and the growth of consciousness it can be nurtured and grow more powerful and prominent in the life of the individual until, quite wonderfully, it takes over and becomes the real driving power in one's life, purifying and transforming the outer nature and entire being of the individual. It supersedes all desires, petty or grand, overwhelms the faulty processes of the surface mind and becomes the dominant force in life and action. It is this divine presence which recognizes and responds most powerfully to the presence of the Divine in life,



including in the beauty and richness of the natural world and also humanity's creative expressions within it.

The Divine expressed in the material world

Accepting Sri Aurobindo's perspective that matter itself is Divine, we necessarily conclude that the natural material world, as created by Him and fully imbued and permeated by His presence, is an embodiment of the Divine. Our involvement with the natural world necessarily comes into play in all aspects of our lives, since we are a part of it. It is also interesting to consider how our interaction with it involves the three aspects of the Triune Path of the Integral Yoga. Simply enjoying the beauty and richness of the Divine's creation from the aesthetic perspective is one of the joys of life on earth and can be the particular purview of the bhakta, as well as a prominent element in any path of yoga. The love one experiences for the beauty of this extraordinary world upon which we have been placed readily translates into love for the Divine. To love the seaside, the mountains, or a single flower, is to love the Divine. This can directly lead to increased intimacy with the Divine and to the true spiritual knowledge, the goal of jnana yoga.

The love and appreciation for the natural world can also readily translate into caring for it and become a form of service to the Divine as karma yoga. The offering of one's work with matter in general, including seeking perfection in work on the material plane with humanity's creations as well as the elements of the natural environment, is very much a part of karma yoga. Furthermore, Sri Aurobindo explains that pursuing knowledge of the material world can be one way of coming close to the Divine. The study of science inevitably becomes the study of the Divine, since the Divine is the essence of matter. Modern physics, particularly the field of quantum mechanics, has come to this realization. In writing on the path of knowledge and referring to Swetaswara Upanishad, VI. 12, Sri Aurobindo describes how that the study of science converges with spiritual realization and can lead to discovery of the Divine:

Not only in the one final conception, but in the great line of its general results Knowledge, by whatever path it is followed, tends to become one. Nothing can be more remarkable and suggestive than the extent to which modern Science confirms in the domain of Matter the conceptions and even the very formulae of language which were arrived at, by a very different method, in the Vedanta,—the original Vedanta, not of the schools of metaphysical philosophy, but of the Upanishads. And these, on the other hand, often reveal their full significance, their richer contents only when they are viewed in the new light shed by the discoveries of modern Science,—for instance, that Vedantic expression which

describes things in the Cosmos as one seed arranged by the universal Energy in multitudinous forms. Significant, especially, is the drive of Science towards a Monism which is consistent with multiplicity, towards the Vedic idea of the one essence with its many becomings.³

Altogether through our involvement in the material world and our appreciation of it, we are offered the blessing of great richness—richness of beauty, love, service, spiritual growth. It is the offering of the Divine Himself to His creation.

Human creativity as sadhana

Whether consciously inspired by the Divine or unconsciously being an instrument of the Divine, humanity's works can become part of sadhana. The works of the laborer, scientist, scholar, industrialist, or artist, all forms of work, have the potential to achieve this. They become so when done in the spirit of a drive for perfection, for making the world a better place, for helping others, and even more so when done as offering to the Divine. A completely transformative progression is available to us. Sri Aurobindo has explained this in his extraordinary conceptualization of the evolution of consciousness, described in powerful detail in *The Life Divine*. Every form of endeavor has the potential to encompass all three aspects of the Triune Path.

Artistic expression does so with a particular richness, and sometimes extravagance of beauty, since it is not essential to our survival. Nevertheless, it is an innate component of human activity and has been so over the ages. Human beings discover inner elevation through experiencing artistic expression, doing so as both creators and observers. Sri Aurobindo has described art as being capable of expressing inner truth and the joy of the Divine's presence and regards it as having a significant role to play in spirituality. He writes:

...The noble and beautiful Arts which are at once work and knowledge,—for every well-made and significant poem, picture, statue or building is an act of creative knowledge, a living discovery of the consciousness, a figure of Truth, a dynamic form of mental and vital self-expression or world-expression,—all that seeks, all that finds, all that voices or figures is a realisation of something of the play of the In-finite and to that extent can be made a means of God-realisation or of divine formation.⁴

Sri Aurobindo also describes spirituality as being the highest field for artistic expression: "Spirituality is a wider thing than formal religion and it is in the service of spirituality that Art reaches its highest self-expression. Spirituality is



a single word expressive of three lines of human aspiration towards divine knowledge, divine love and joy, divine strength, and that will be the highest and most perfect Art....”⁵

In poetry, music, painting or other forms of artistic expression, that which is most expressive of the Divine originates from the psychic level, emanating from this brilliant spark of pure divinity within the being. As with everything, there are levels and degrees of quality of consciousness. Beauty is appreciated primarily by the vital or emotional aspect of our nature, and this too has levels and also degrees of intensity. Yet all have their potential for divine quality in expressing beauty. Appreciating the span from lower to higher can be a progressive experience, evolving as the individual evolves and as one develops in increasing awareness and also in consciousness in the greater spiritual sense. At its highest, the experience of beauty becomes ananda, as Sri Aurobindo describes: “Beauty is Ananda taking form—but the form need not be a physical shape. One speaks of a beautiful thought, a beautiful act, a beautiful soul.

What we speak of as beauty is Ananda in manifestation; beyond manifestation beauty loses itself in Ananda or, you may say, beauty and Ananda become indistinguishably one.”⁶

Sri Aurobindo also writes that “Beauty is the way in which the physical expresses the Divine—but the principle and law of Beauty is something inward and spiritual and expresses itself through the form.”⁷ This understanding further supports engagement with the material world, both the natural world of the Divine’s direct creation and the creative works of humanity, as His instruments. The Divine has given us the opportunity to discover and express Him through our creative capacities as a great blessing of richness, enhancing our potential to experience joy within ourselves and to find it in our expressive processes, as well as in the magnificent outer world of His creation.

Conclusion

In opening to the beauty and richness of life in the material world, we also open ourselves to the Divine and His influence in our lives. Furthermore, we more fully participate in the possibilities for growth and transformation. Sri Aurobindo explains this wonderfully and helps us to appreciate the richness of his perspective in the Integral Yoga:

The spiritual life does not need, for its purity, to destroy

interest in all things except the Inexpressible or to cut at the roots of the Sciences, the Arts and Life. It may well be one of the effects of an integral spiritual knowledge and activity to lift them out of their limitations, substitute for our mind’s ignorant, limited, tepid or trepidant pleasure in them a free, intense and uplifting urge of delight and supply a new source of creative spiritual power and illumination by which they can be carried more swiftly and profoundly towards their absolute light in knowledge and their yet undreamed possibilities and most dynamic energy of content and form and practice. The one thing needful must be pursued first and always; but all things else come with it as its outcome and have not so much to be added to us as recovered and reshaped in its self-light and as portions of its self-expressive force.”⁸

Accepting Sri Aurobindo’s perspective that matter itself is Divine, we necessarily conclude that the natural material world, as created by Him and fully imbued and permeated by His presence, is an embodiment of the Divine.

Therefore, while we may recognize that our goal and purpose in life is our spiritual development and evolution,

we can understand from Sri Aurobindo that all aspects of being and life in the world, including those which may seem extravagant and not directly related to spirituality, can be part of our spiritual practice. Our pursuit of some of the richer forms of expression, and pursuit of perfection with these, can aid in our development. Furthermore, our endeavors in fields such as the arts and sciences can also serve to elevate them and aid in transforming them into more fully realized expressions of the Divine.

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Essays

The three sisters

by Michael Miovic

A long time ago, in a little village in a far off corner of the world, there lived a woman who gave birth to four children. Her eldest, a son, was a sombre and serious child who died of a snake bite before age ten. The woman then had three very lively daughters, who were so energetic, in fact, that they turned out to be immortal. Unfortunately, one day the woman's husband went off hunting and never returned, leaving her to raise these three girls all alone. She loved her daughters dearly and did her best to teach them good values, but, alas, the girls turned out to be absolutely wicked. So wicked, indeed, that all we remember today is the story of those three terrible sisters. The history of their mother has been mostly lost in the mists of time. All we know about her is that in ancient days people used to call her the First Mother. Why they called her that is a mystery, but maybe it is because she was the first mother to give birth to immortals.

According to legend, the First Mother was not blind to that fact that her three daughters behaved badly, so in time she came to call them not by their birth names, but by their nicknames, which were Night, Murder and Chaos. She always uttered those names with great love and affection, and the villagers used to make jokes about her habit of cooing out mellifluous admonitions, such as "Night, honey, can you stop stomping out all the fires? People need them to cook." Or "Murder, darling, please stop killing animals unless you are going to eat them. They never did anything to hurt you." And finally, "My



beautiful Chaos, please put everything back where you got it when you are done demolishing our hut, or you might not be able to find what you need tomorrow." But the three sisters never listened to their mother, and they went on about their increasingly destructive business.

As the girls grew, their behavior became so atrocious that no young men would marry them, and no one in the village could stand them anymore. Night infected everyone with her dark and depressing thoughts, Murder poisoned all relationships with her constant plots and manipulations, and Chaos was such a drama queen that even the village dogs avoided her. Eventually the villagers had had enough: life in the village had become unbearable. They called a meeting of the elders to discuss what to do. The wise men and women talked all night, all the next day, again all night, and again all day. They really didn't know what to do. Their hearts were torn and their heads hurt from so much thinking. They wanted to do the right thing, but there seemed to be no solution to the problem. Finally, they decided that all they could do was ask the three sisters to leave. They requested the First Mother to stay and let her three daughters go, but the First Mother would not abandon her children. So, in the end, rather than letting the family of four destroy the whole village, they threw them all out. Out into the harsh world, which in those days still contained vast expanses

of dangerous wilderness.

Thus it came to pass that the three terrible sisters, and their humble mother, were banished into exile. However, by now the girls were no longer girls—they had grown into young women. Their minds were sharp, their wills firm, and their dreams were much larger than to be stuck dragging their mother around the world like an old, tattered basket. Murder, being a planner by nature, was the first to address the problem.

"Mother," she said, "you're too old to keep up. You serve us no purpose. All you do is slow us down."

"Yes, my darling," the First Mother answered sweetly, "you are perfectly right. Why don't you girls go on ahead and I'll catch up with you?"

"Ha!" Chaos laughed, "you couldn't catch up with a snail."

"It makes no difference," Night said curtly, "you'll be dead by morning. The wild animals will eat you."

"True, my children," the First Mother said, "all very good points. In any case, you are big now and no longer need me. I set you free. Go forth into the world and become who you are. My parting advice is that you always stick together. You will accomplish more by cooperating with each other than by competing."

So saying, the First Mother kissed each of her three daughters on the forehead, and blessed them all together with a radiant smile. In return, the girls scowled and skulked off. Cruel as it sounds, they just left their mother alone in the wilderness to die. And since the sisters were intensely jealous and competitive with each other, within hours they set to arguing. The only thing they agreed upon is that no company is better than bad company, so goodbye and good riddance. *Au revoir.*

"I'm going to the city," Chaos announced. "It's boring out here and I am so done with you two. *Ciao bambinas*, you wet noodles." And off she went to the nearest city. It was the dawn of civilization, and cities were just starting to



crop up here and there. Arrived in town, Chaos lost no time in throwing herself into the hustle and bustle of city life. She quickly made hundreds of friends and enemies, and thrived on disrupting the rules that were needed to make cities run. She was constantly up to no good, unbalancing accounts, blocking those new-fangled open sewers, infesting food stores with insects, stealing from the marketplace, brewing wine and beer to fuel drunken fights, and inciting riots. In short order she became the matron of a thriving brothel business, which she spread from town to town along with venereal diseases. She loved the infamy, the crimes of passion, the sordid squalor of it all. Thrown out of one city for her disorderly conduct, she would simply move on to the next and bide her time until the denizens of the first invited her back for entertainment.

Murder also went to the city, but naturally to a different city from her sister Chaos. However, she was more careful in her approach, and took several years to study the situation before committing to action. Finally, when the time was ripe, she made her move and entered a career in government. She had a longterm plan to cultivate the lethal opportunities of monarchy and the priestly class, and thus control the people's hearts and minds and direct these towards deadly ends. She refined herself, learned artful manners and how to cloak her foul intentions in soothing words, and thus married into nobility. She then proceeded to foment intrigues, executions, assassinations, and eventually full-scale wars. Along the way, she also learned that children make wonderful pawns. Ah, how she delighted in molding and manipulating them, twisting their need for affection and approval towards corrupt ends, turning them against each other. Siblings make the best enemies, Murder found, and she made sure that every royal family reached its full potential for mutual hatred.

Meanwhile, as her two sisters con-

centrated on cities, Night focused on everything and nothing. She went in all directions and no particular direction. She just wandered. When she was in the woods and mountains and jungles, she practiced wilting flowers and withering foliage with her stark gaze. She generally disdained living things, and as a result living things tried to avoid her. Large predators recoiled in fear at the sight of her black eyes, and even nocturnal animals felt uncomfortable in her presence, because she made the darkness suffocating and impenetrable. Or, when she decided to monitor the movements of humans and her two sisters, she would lurk around the outskirts of towns, or haunt the roads and trade routes between cities. Woe unto the poor traveler who crossed her path in the night: the lucky ones died of fright on the spot, while the unlucky ones had to live out the remainder of their days blighted by the memory of her implacable blackness, their dreams haunted by a paralyzing void.

No doubt you would like to know some more personal details about the three sisters. What did they look like? When and where exactly did they live? What normal names did they go by? How exactly did they move across generations and locations? These are all good questions, but unfortunately difficult to answer. You see, it was not exactly safe for people to walk up to one of the sisters and say, "Excuse me, Ma'am, but I'm recording history and would like to make a sketch of you and ask a few questions." People being people, there were a few idiots who tried that and died, and today all we can do is hope that their genetic material was not passed on before their demise. However, the smarter folk generally kept a safe distance from the three sisters, once they figured out who they were. Thus, all that comes down to us today are stories, myths and legends, fictions without facts. But there are veiled and not so veiled references to the three sisters everywhere in the

world—in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, and all of the Americas. In India the yogis called them asuras and even taught a few souls how live free of the sister's evil influence, but even the yogis were powerless to change the nature of Night, Murder and Chaos.

One fact we do know, however, is that the three sisters were remarkably adaptable. They were like chameleons and could change their appearance at will. They loved to alter the color of their skin, hair and eyes, and they learned to speak all the languages in the world. They practiced every religion, and lived in every country. They could even turn themselves into men, or take on an androgynous form, if doing so suited their ends. Perhaps most astonishingly of all, they could live in many different bodies at once. Who knows how they accomplished that feat, but apparently they did. And yes, they married, and yes they had children. Sorry I can't be more specific than that, but if I could then both of us would have to be terminated, so take comfort in what you don't know.

Thus the ages passed, and the three sisters grew increasingly skilled, sinister, and effective in their ways. Chaos ripened and became buxom and robust, and came into the fullness of her prodigious powers. She found that she could unsettle weather patterns and natural events, and that became her specialty. Tornadoes, hurricanes, draughts, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, famines, and the like. She also loved the mayhem of war, the gore of human sacrifice, the lurid ritual of cannibalism. And when these delights were in short supply—such as during stifling periods of peace and plenty—then she distracted herself with lust, affairs, inconvenient pregnancies, love quarrels, minor stab-bings and beheadings, and practicing pseudo-seizures and perfecting what we now call borderline personality disorder. Oh, and possession, let us not forget that. Those were the days, the glory



days she would call them in later years, of demons, djinns, devils, spirits, curses, black magic, etc. An endless feast of natural and supernatural disturbances were her days—and the after hours were even better.

Murder, on the other hand, became the queen of nefarious methods. She loved grand schemes, plots, subterfuges, power plays, the masterful chess move. She was the supreme strategist, no doubt about it. The rise and fall of empires, that was her thing. She flourished in courts and palaces, honed the insidious half-truths of priests and temples, shrewdly let one death go today if it would bring two tomorrow. She quietly and patiently strangled her victims over years and generations, by building social traditions and institutions that appeared to sustain people in the short-term, only to suffocate them in the end. Or, when times were bad and there were no empires to build or conquer, then Murder dabbled in the paranoid delusions of psychotic illness, while turning the brunt of her formidable skill to family dynamics. It was not much to brag about, she admitted, but the effective killer is focused on content not style, on getting the job done and not on how the job looks. Murder always opined that Chaos had no grasp of these finer points of discipline and purpose. How many lives had Murder claimed with niceties and tranquil order? Too numerous to count, my friends, in quantities unnumbered. There is nothing more effective than the nice family or society where people are always pleasant, never say anything negative or disagreeable to each other, go about life with perfect decorum as the heart dies and the soul leaves. Ah, the genius of it! The best murder is that conducted in open view, with the full support of the sacred institutions of family and society, and ends with the conclusion that nothing wrong has happened, nothing wrong at all. When the people say, with genuine bewilder-

ment, “what murder? there is no murder here,” that is the perfect murder.

As for Night, she kept to herself and concentrated on more cosmic concerns while her two sisters wasted their time on trivialities. “Why all this preoccupation with the petty lives of human beings and this space dust called Earth?” she brooded to herself. “What about the immensities of time and space? All these stars, galaxies, cosmos, universes—it is all so empty and fleeting. Everything that is, is but a small and transient disturbance in the endless domain of Night. Complete blackness is the beginning and ending of all things created, and that is final cold, hard, Fact. Chaos and Murder are fighting to see who shall control a few miserable people, give or take a few billion lives and years, but that is nothing. While they are busy with that, I shall extinguish them both—and the very ground on which they stand. I shall rain down on them and this moribund planet endless and impenetrable Darkness. Daylight and flowers and green things and the chirping of birds are all bright distractions from the final truth, which is that all ends in Night. The infinite vacancies of space and the crushing abysses of black holes are all that await these fools. Let them say what they say, think what they think, feel what they feel—for some little time. I am the final word, and everyone knows it.”

Or, to the extent that Night occasionally dallied in human affairs, it was to propagate loneliness, poverty, depressive disorders, neurodegenerative disease, and bleak housing projects. As Night always said, “I am the dark underbelly to every bright mood, the end to every flight of hope, the unstated conclusion to every conversation, that dark presence that surrounds every prayer, watches every meditation and haunts every dream.” That was her mantra.

Now, as world’s population grew, inevitably the three sisters came into increasing contact and therefore con-

flict with each other. At first they managed this by dividing up territory, but of course that was only short lived and all too soon they set to fighting over who controlled which place or group of people. Thus it came to pass that one day the three sisters found themselves face to face not far from the spot where they had abandoned their mother so many years ago. In grand family fashion, they skipped introductory pleasantries and got right down to business:

“You’re an idiot,” Murder hissed at Chaos, “can’t you see that the total amount of order is increasing as civilization grows? All that your drama does is stimulate people to become more orderly and plan better, which increases my domain. You’re playing right into my hands.”

“You witch,” Chaos snapped back, “I’m the only one of us three whom people actually like. To put it simply, I’m fun and you’re not. People are addicted to me, and therefore I win.”

“Oh really?!” Murder sneered as she put her hands on her hips in a sassy fashion. “And therein lies the essence of your idiocy—vanity, wanting attention. That’s why you are always running around the world shouting, ‘look what I did, I just killed someone! Did you see that? Did you see that? I did that.’”

“Oh well,” Chaos sighed with the epitome of indifference, as she inspected her fingernails, “I guess that’s why every one of your pretty little civilizations has ended in chaos and collapse.” And then she suddenly bellowed at her sister, “brought down by me!”

“Yada, yada, yada,” Night yawned. “Listen to them bicker. We all know how this Earth story will end, which is the way it started: as a lifeless heap of frozen rock floating in the blackness of space. I get the last laugh.”

“Well, you certainly get a laugh,” Murder and Chaos agreed, as they turned together on Night. “For being a total failure. In case you haven’t noticed, the two of us are vying for control of the



world, and you're out of the running."

"Go on then, go on," Night bowed in mock deference as she made a shooing motion with her hands. "You two know best. I have full confidence you will figure out who runs the world."

Murder and Chaos stared at Night in hateful silence. Murder bit her lip in cold fury, but Chaos couldn't contain her anger and spat at Night, right in her face.

Night kept her poise as she wiped off the spit. "I'm outta here," she said as she turned to go. "Oh, and by the way, would you turn out the lights when you leave? If you want your little contest to last, you better learn how to save energy. You're depleting the Earth's precious resources."

Thus the council of the three sisters ended in an impasse. Each went back to her old ways, and more time passed. However, as far as human beings were concerned, the fact that the three sisters were fighting with each other made no difference to the hapless people caught in their crossfire. The world scene just kept getting worse and worse. Colonialism, slavery, wars, genocides, and then that dynamic trio of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao—the sisters' evil influence seemed to be invincible.

Finally, the situation on Earth became so dire that people started to pray for help. They didn't know who or what they were praying to, they were just so desperate that they hoped beyond hope that an answer would come. And they started to search for Truth, for some sort of clue as to the solution for their predicament. At some point—no one knows how or where—people got the feeling that if they could find the First Mother, maybe she could persuade her three daughters to change. It was mere wishful religious thinking, of course, completely

unscientific and quasi-delusional, but there was no other option left, so this is what the simple people did. Not the powerful elites who were busy running corporations and countries, nor the brilliant scientists who were busy developing dangerous technologies, nor even the intellectuals who were busy making isms, but simple people across the world. They started to look for that long lost First Mother who might know what to do.

Quite predictably the quest failed—though not for the reason you might think. It didn't fail because there was no First Mother, but rather because there was and the three sisters conspired to hide this fact. You see, in the course of making humanity miserable, the three sisters did a lot of traveling. It was part

The world scene just kept getting worse and worse. Colonialism, slavery, wars, genocides, and then that dynamic trio of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao—the sisters' evil influence seemed to be invincible.

of the job, and as the Earth's population grew and civilization spread, the three sisters naturally had to travel further and wider afield. From their countless contacts with people around the globe, the sisters heard many stories about bad mothers, and when psychology became popular they heard even more stories about bad mothers. At first the sisters didn't pay much attention to these stories, because they were busy with their professional responsibilities. However, slowly they became unsettled. All these stories began to remind them of their own mother, and they started to worry: what if the old lady were still alive? Not likely, of course, but if she were, then maybe they ought to go find her and finish her off. After all, she did know a few childhood secrets about them, and these might become inconvenient in the future.

Since each sister hoped to extract

some juicy gossip from the First Mother with which to blackmail her siblings, each set off secretly on her own search. I won't detail their many misadventures here, but to make a long story short the sisters each got strong leads suggesting that the First Mother was up in a cave in the Himalayas. Thus, as fate would have it, one fine spring day the three sisters found themselves together again, face to face in front of a little cave up in the mountains. You can probably guess what happened next: they set right to fighting. They said some truly nasty things to each other, and in the end Night and Murder ganged up on Chaos and killed her.

"What!?" you protest. "Night and Murder killed Chaos? But that is impossible because Chaos is immortal." Well, the world is full of unexpected events, and if ever there was a being who was

prone to the unexpected, it was Chaos, and thus the impossible happened to her. Night and Murder made a plan to kill Chaos—while plotting to double-cross each other next—and they did the dastardly deed. In short order the God of Death arrived to claim Chaos and take her to the Underworld, and that is when things got really strange.

"Welcome, my sister," Death said in his big, low voice. "I have a place ready for you."

Night and Murder stopped dead in their tracks, no pun intended. They looked at each other in surprise, blood still dripping from their hands, and then at the spirit forms of Death and Chaos, and then back again to each other. "What do you mean, 'sister'?" they asked in unison.

"Well, she's my sister," Death said nonchalantly. "And by the way, so are you two."



The three sisters all looked at each other in shock, and then stared at Death with their jaws hanging open.

"Oh," Death said with malicious innocence, "I thought you knew."

"Um, well," Murder stammered, "no, not really. What do you mean?"

"Remember the older brother who died before you were born? That was me."

"Oh," the three sisters said awkwardly. "Oh my." There was a long, uncomfortable silence. "So we're related, then?" They laughed awkwardly, and then Murder waved at Death in a giddy fashion and said "Hi there."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Night inquired, with a mortified expression. "I mean, we've been delivering corpses to you since the dawn of time, and you never said a word."

"You never asked," Death answered.

All three sisters looked abashed. Each fiddled nervously with her hair. Talk about a family secret!

"So Mother never spoke to you about me?" Death demanded.

"Um...uh..." the three sisters stammered and stalled.

"No," Chaos pronounced definitively at last. "No, she did not."

Death brooded and fumed. "Figures," he muttered. "I'm always the forgotten one."

"Well, you should have said something," Murder shot off in an accusatory tone, regaining her spunk. "You're the oldest, so that was your responsibility."

"Yeah," Night and Chaos concurred, "that was your responsibility."

"My responsibility?" Death replied defensively. "So you three are going to stand there and tell me that in countless millennia of passing off corpses to me, it never once occurred to you to ask me who I am, where I come from, and what I do?" He glared at them.

The three sisters just stood there in silence, not knowing what to say.

"That precisely is the problem with you three," Death raised his voice in indignation as he launched into them.

"You're so wrapped up in your little competition with each other, that you couldn't be bothered with what death actually is. You're all so eager to kill people, but let me ask you this: has any of you ever stopped to wonder what happens to people after they die?" He raised his voice with a righteous flourish at the end of his speech to emphasize his point.

The three sisters looked at each other guiltily. In fact it had never once occurred to them to wonder about what happened to people after they died. They had been so preoccupied with getting them to die that they had overlooked that question.

Chaos spoke up again, on behalf of her sisters. "That's because the afterlife seemed like a philosophical issue to us," she explained diplomatically.

"Yeah," Night and Murder chimed in, "it didn't seem like a practical concern to us."

Death glowered at the two living sisters. "Maybe not for you two," he said, and then wheeled and faced Chaos. "But for you, my dear sister, now it is. Let's see if you think it's all just "philosophy" now."

With that, Death put his leash around Chaos and pulled her down into the Underworld. It is hard to explain what happened next in terms of time, because death is a timeless state, but Death had a very bad time of it with Chaos. If you know anything at all about mythology, you know that the Underworld is an orderly place. Death rules it all, and no one leaves without his permission. Also, the souls of the dead have to leave the Earth and not interact with the living. Well, you can imagine what happened when Chaos arrived there and started doing her thing: total chaos. She disrespected all the rules, taught the dead how to communicate with the living, and then she instigated rebellion by luring souls into illegal reincarnation. All very scandalous stuff, and it made a big splash on the

Hades news, with 24 hour coverage and pundits commenting on how Death had egg on his face, and what was he going to do about it?

That did it. *Basta*. Death grabbed Chaos by the hair and dragged her right back to the cave where he found her, and flung her back on her two nasty sisters, who were now deeply engrossed in trying to strangle each other. "Here," he snarled, "you can have her back, I don't want her."

"We don't want her either," Night and Murder snarled back in unison. "She's dead, she's your problem now. Deal with her."

"No," Death replied, "I won't. I'm done with her."

Various insults flew in all directions, things escalated, and suddenly many daggers, fangs, claws, and weapons both old and new were drawn. A mighty tussle ensued, and someone got a finger on that little red button that sets off all the hydrogen bombs and even the foundations of the Underworld started to shake.

Whereupon an old but still sweet voice floated out of the cave, fluttering like a butterfly in the spring breeze. "Oh my beautiful Night, my lovely Chaos, my tender Murder, my brave and strong Death. Come in my children, come in."

All the many hands and weapons suddenly stopped moving and the four siblings regained their composure. Remembering their common enemy, they banded together and walked into the cave. Presently they found themselves standing in front of one extremely old mother. She was lying on a bed of rock, and she looked quite worn by time. Her hands were gnarled, her skin wrinkled and mottled blue from poor circulation. Still, she was neat and clean, smelled of roses, and she had a radiant smile.

"Well, well," Death said dryly, "we meet again, mother. Always nice to be forgotten by you."

"I never forget you, my son," the First Mother said gently, "never."



"Ugh," Chaos blurted out in disgust, "you look awful."

"Yes," Night and Murder chimed in, "you're ugly, you smell bad, and you're a terrible mother. You never told us about Death."

"I love you, too," the First Mother said patiently, "and I'm sorry I didn't tell you about Death sooner. I was waiting until you were grown to explain the whole story, but then I lost you in the wilderness and have been waiting for you ever since. I'm so glad you came back."

The First Mother smiled sweetly, and the three sisters stood mute, not knowing what to say. "So how can I help you now?" the First Mother asked.

"Well, I'll cut to the chase," Death replied, "Chaos is wrecking the Underworld and I want her out."

"And I want to rule the world," the three sisters said simultaneously. Then each scowled at the others. And all together, "and we want you gone."

The First Mother was quiet for a long time, meditating. Finally she came out of her trance and said, "Well, children, I think that if you consented to work together, you could rule everything."

The children fidgeted in silence. It was a radical and distasteful idea, but the logic of it was impeccable. Much as they hated to admit it, and much as they hated each other, there was no denying the fact that they had complementary skills and would make a formidable team.

"You mean," Murder said slowly, "make an evil plot to rule the world together, without you?"

"The universe, I want the universe," Night added.

"Yes," the First Mother said, "if that is what you want."

There was another long silence.

"But I'm dead now," said Chaos, "what about that?"

"Even better," the First Mother replied, "if you three work together with your brother, the four of you can rule both life and death now. All of it."

"But what about me?" Death said. "What do I get out of this?"

"Ah!" the First Mother perked up, beginning to sound almost enthusiastic. "I can't make Chaos leave the Underworld because you already claimed her. But think of this: right now all you rule is the dead. If you let the dead talk to the living, then you can extend your range of influence to claim the living. And you have to admit, your life was getting too routine and dreary down there. Isn't it

Whereupon an old but still sweet voice floated out of the cave, fluttering like a butterfly in the spring breeze. "Oh my beautiful Night, my lovely Chaos, my tender Murder, my brave and strong Death. Come in my children, come in."

so my child?"

Death hung his head, shuffled his feet, then answered mournfully, "Yes mother, the underworld is dreary."

"Right," said the First Mother in an encouraging tone. "Perfect predictability is tiring. Look, why don't you do this: make a new agreement. Chaos can traffic souls back to life if you don't notice, but if you catch her then the souls have to come back and you can extract a small penalty from her. That will make for good sport."

"I like that!" Chaos said impulsively. "And can I extract something from him if I win?"

The First Mother smiled at her, and then looked steadily at Death.

He twiddled his fingers and hummed to himself for awhile. "All right," he said at last.

"Deal?" the First Mother said looking between the two.

"Deal," they both said, and shook on it.

"Let me kiss you all, my children," the First Mother said. Each bent down in turn, and received a kiss on the forehead. Then the four siblings walked out into clearing in front of the cave to confer.

Murder was the first to speak. "This is all very nice, and I admit it's a good plan. We work together to control the world, rule life and death, and Death gets to influence the living and have more fun. But I still say we need to get rid of the old lady once and for all. We've got our plan, we don't need her anymore, and she could be trouble for us in the future."

The four siblings looked at each other and nodded. No further words were needed.

"Right," Death said, "let's do this."

Immediately, Chaos turned her face towards the mouth

of the cave and started to yell at such a volume that it killed all the animals within a fifty mile radius and gave the First Mother a brain hemorrhage. Next, Night summoned a black hole from the vacancies of cosmic space, and beamed it right into the cave, compressing everything inside into infinitesimal oblivion. Death then sealed up the entry with the densest rock of Hades, which even black holes cannot destroy, and finally Murder covered the whole site in dirt to conceal their tracks and erase any evidence of the where the First Mother had been.

"That ought to do it," she said cheerfully, as she brushed the dust off her hands and inspected their work. "I don't know if she was a bad mother, but she certainly was a stupid one. Only a fool gives away a master plan without keeping the key for yourself." With that, the four turned and walked away, well satisfied with the day's labors.

Thus it was that a new age of the world commenced, and it was strange



indeed. Chaos taught the dead to communicate with the living, Death had more fun, and Murder and Night cooperated to kill more people. However, human beings weren't as scared anymore, because they could communicate with the dead, and they heard about the little game between Chaos and Death, so they no longer viewed death as final. And when news leaked that the First Mother had been found and hidden, a hue and cry went up among the masses and accountability was demanded. Riots broke out, mobs formed, and angry protestors rounded up the three sisters and Death himself, and summarily marched them up to the Himalayas.

Arriving at the cave with shouting crowds behind them, the four siblings undid their evil spells and blasted a new entry into the cave. Alas, when the hopeful multitudes finally laid eager eyes inside the cave, it was empty. There was no trace of the First Mother to be found, not even a pile of bones. The common folk were quite disappointed about the lack of bones, because it would have made a nice outing for generations of pilgrims to go look at those bones. But human beings are resilient, having survived the combined action of Night, Murder, Chaos and Death down through the ages, and they adjusted. There was much speculation about what had happened to the First Mother, whether she still existed or indeed had ever existed, and that spawned a new industry of books, websites and documentaries. A leading theory was that she had been an alien from another planet who was naive and not well adapted to life on Earth. She had been too simple and humble, that was her mistake. On the other hand, various psychologists studied the issue and concluded that she had been unable to set limits with her children due to an unresolved trauma history, while the feminists blamed the absent father. Etc., etc.

While people were distracted with these important speculations, the four

siblings quietly slipped away and returned to their usual labors, only now they made an effort to work together. After spending a year developing a business plan and raising capital, they opened a chain of inns named Invigoration. The idea was to cater to families who wanted to expose their children to a taste of abroad while staying in their home country. Each inn highlighted the culture of a particular country, replete with authentic ethnic cuisine, dress, music, customs, art, architecture and even flora and fauna. When the families came to the grand dinner banquet, Murder played hostess, seating the eager families and educating them about the culture on display. Chaos loved to play waitress, so she came in next to take orders and serve the meal. About half way through dinner, Night breathed a cold miasma of paralytic gas through the ventilation system, so that the victims remained awake but rooted in their seats. Chaos then returned and vibrated the tablecloth at a gradually increasing tempo, using a delicate flicking motion of her wrist, as the guests watched in mounting fear and horror. Then, at the moment of peak dramatic tension, she sent pulses of electromagnetic radiation through the tablecloth that jumped into the cardiac conduction systems of all those seated, causing fatal arrhythmias. She usually liked to kill one of the parents first, so that the rest of the family would watch and wail in terror before she picked off each of them in turn. However, sometimes she stopped all the hearts simultaneously, to vary the routine and prevent monotony. And, finally, Death did his rounds and carried the devastated souls away, periodically adding a soundtrack of mocking laughter for cinematic effect.

Initially the foul foursome did a booming business with Invigoration, and they were proud of their success and newfound ability to cooperate. It seemed that very soon they would control the world. Unfortunately for them, right

around this time the hospitality industry implemented its new customer satisfaction methodology, which required outcome surveys. Night was tasked with writing the questionnaire for Invigoration, and after taking an online course in customer service and marketing, she decided to use the U.S. Armed Forces After-Action Assessment Form (short version) as a model. She chose this instrument because it has been combat-validated and translated into over 500 languages. After tweaking the language a bit, she had Death poll the deceased and directed Murder to analyze the data. The results showed that Invigoration did poorly on the following three questions:

1) On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with the devastation we wrought upon you and your loved ones?

2) Did we kill you painlessly enough?

3) Would you recommend our service to friends or family who need to be destroyed?

As a result of negative customer feedback, Invigoration lost market share to the Rajan Brothers, an international hotel group headquartered in India. The Rajan Brother's motto was, "100% of customers survive our service," which really struck a nerve with the public. The Brothers offered families the option of sitting on the floor during meals and eating from steel tala trays with their hands, like Indians do, thus avoiding the need to use tablecloths. According to a study by the Indian Institute of Mythology, this story proves that Hinduism is holy and that Western culinary habits are pernicious. According to the Republican Party of the United States, this story proves that free trade is holy, that Jesus Christ was a capitalist, and that the U.S. Army saved the world. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, this story may explain the recent rise in the global incidence and prevalence of tablecloth phobias, but further research is needed.

Thus, once again humanity survived



against all odds and carried on, albeit at a limp. The U.S. Army won the Nobel Peace Prize for its After-Action Assessment form, which was commended for "historic contributions to improving the destruction experience." Of course the average human being still wished things could be better in the world, but people were grateful that things were not worse.

Life went on in this way for some time, and then one day, in a little village in a far-off corner of the world, an orphan showed up. No one knew his name or where he had come from, but he wandered into the village one day and asked for something to eat. Being villagers, they gladly gave him half of the food they didn't have, whereas in a city they would have let him starve. The boy was thankful for the meal and started to open up. He talked about various and sundry things, and then happened to mention that he knew the First Mother. Of course this was electrifying news, and soon the whole village was gathered around him in a circle, including the priest, the guru, the shamaness, the witch doctor, the chief, and the one schizophrenic they could rustle up on short notice. The villagers peppered the boy with questions.

"Are you sure you have seen her?"

"Yes, certain."

"Is she still in the cave?"

"No."

"Where is she?"

"She gets around."

"What color is her hair?"

"Hard to say."

"What about her eyes?"

"Also hard to say, but they see everything."

"What does she like to eat?"

"It depends which country she is in."

"Well, which country is she in?"

"All of them."

"Why does she hide herself?"

"She doesn't, just people don't look for her."

"We did, and we couldn't find her."

"Then look again. Or just sit still and let her come to you."

They went round and round like that, and the villagers screwed up their faces and racked their brains. The schizophrenic was certain that the boy was right, but no one else could figure out if the boy was lying or telling the truth, being profound or evasive, wise or witless. At last the chief intervened and ruled that this was a case for the authorities. Messengers were dispatched and by the next day government officials arrived and whisked the boy away to an orphanage in the city so that he could be educated. The story about the First Mother was suppressed so as not to cause a media frenzy, and that appeared to be the end of the matter.

At school, the orphan boy was quiet and kept to himself. He was studious and read a lot, and he liked to write poetry. He didn't have many friends, and the teachers pegged him as a dreamer. The government officials came periodically to check on him and make sure that he was not talking about the First Mother, and he obliged their wishes. After a couple years they concluded that the case was closed.

But not so Night, Murder, Chaos and Death. They had an uneasy feeling about this orphan boy, and thus they decided to pay him a visit, just to be sure there was nothing of concern that they might have missed. They caught the boy alone in a park one day, and politely introduced themselves.

"Little boy," Night said, "I am Night, and I am the black void in which all things end."

"Pleased to meet you," he said, and smiled innocently.

"And I am Murder," her sister said in a threatening tone, "I planned the execution of everyone you have ever met."

"Very good," he said, and smiled again.

"I am Chaos," the third sister proclaimed, "I destroy all order."

"And I am Death," the last one add-

ed in his deep, echoing voice, "and I have a place ready for you."

The boy calmly inspected these four fearsome beings from head to foot, and then bid them to sit down on the bench next to him. "And how may I help you?" he asked.

"You say that you know the First Mother."

"Yes," he replied, "that is a fact."

"How?"

"I talk with her every day."

There was stunned silence, during which the boy was unflappable.

"What does she tell you?" they grilled him.

"That you would come looking for me one day. And that I would be so happy to meet you." The boy paused, then flashed a bright smile, "and I am. I'm so glad that you finally found me."

The four siblings looked at each other in disbelief. Then to him, "Why?"

"Because you are my family."

"Cut the crap," Chaos blurted out, "this isn't a joke, you know."

"Do you have any idea who you are dealing with?" Murder hissed at him.

Night just stared at the boy with a gaze of stony blackness.

The boy smiled again, completely at ease with the situation.

Now even Death became unnerved. "Who are you?" he demanded. "What is your name?"

The boy thought about the question for awhile. "I have different names in different lands. Some people call me Morning Star. I call myself Future."

"Future?!" the four said with incredulity.

"Yes, Future. I am the last child of our one mother. Death came first, then Night, Murder and Chaos, and I was born last. After you four left home."

You can imagine the reaction this last statement provoked. Talk about a family secret! The four siblings were speechless as their jaws hung open in shock.

"What are you doing here?" Mur-



der demanded, suspicious that the First Mother had a plot.

"The same thing you are doing here," Future answered, "carrying on the evolution of consciousness."

"We're not carrying on the evolution of anything," Night said coldly, "we intend to end it."

Death held up a hand in gesture of authority. "Enough. Let us focus on first things first. Where is our mother?"

"Everywhere," Future said, "she left her body and lives in every human heart now. Well, actually, behind the human heart, in a manner of speaking."

"What do you mean, 'behind the heart'?"

Future whistled as he contemplated the answer to that question. "It's hard to explain," he said after reflection. "She's in the soul, you know, not in the physical heart."

"So how do we find the soul?"

"Why do you ask?" Future inquired.

"We'd like to find the First Mother and kill her," they all said in unison. "So that we can rule the world."

"Oh," Future said benignly, "then let me be more specific. Here's how you do it: you need Light to see the soul, Love to make it grow, Harmony to make it speak, and Life to unleash its energies. After you've done those four steps, then you can summon the First Mother."

"How?"

"You have to call her by her true name, and sincerely want her help."

"What is her true name?"

"She has different names for different people,"

"Cut the philosophical crap," Chaos interjected.

Future looked steadily at his sister, and said in a deliberate tone "but I call her Hope."

That was too much for Night. She pulled off her black leather gloves and threw them on the ground. "I'm not doing this," she sneered, "Hope and sincerity? Gag me with a spoon. I don't do hope and sincerity. I do darkness."

But Murder was more politic in her reply. "Okay," she said, "Okay. So let's say you are Future and you speak with our mother. So what? What else did she tell you?"

"Your true names," Future answered placidly.

"What do you mean our true names?"

"Your true names. Not what people call you, but what she calls you."

The fearsome four looked at each other in surprise, caught between curiosity and disbelief.

"We know our true names," Death answered.

"No you don't," Future said, "Your true names are Light, Love, Harmony and Life."

"What do you mean? That can't be true."

"Yes, it is true. You see, the first language had many double meanings, so later on people mistranslated your names. Night is actually Light, and Murder is Love. Chaos is Harmony, and Death is Life. It's all a big misunderstanding based on a little error in translation."

The four siblings still looked skeptical.

"Look," Future said as he lowered his voice into a conspiratorial whisper and swept his gaze around the park to make sure no mere mortals were listening. "Don't tell me you counted on the human mind to get the translation right. Just look around the planet. These people are inept. They have absolutely no idea of what they are doing."

At that, the four siblings blushed in shame and embarrassment. The boy had a point.

Future laughed brightly. "Okay, we all make mistakes, me too. So you believed the names these people gave you?"

The foursome hung their heads morosely.

"I like being Night," she sniffled, "darkness makes me feel eternal and

invincible."

"Yeah, and I like being Murder," she whimpered, "killing makes me feel competent."

"Dammit!" Chaos stomped the ground and waved her arms in the air, "I am NOT, NOT going to follow rules!"

Future tenderly patted each of his siblings on the back. "Don't worry, I still love you. I think each of you is great and wonderful and powerful and free."

Death brooded on all that had come to pass. "Very well," he said gravely, "so you are our younger brother and we have to change our names. Even so, you cannot change the past. All the deeds that we have done since time immemorial cannot be undone. The laws of karma are immutable, even for us."

"Oh bosh," Future waved away the concern lightly, "nonsense. I change the past all the time."

"How?"

"Well, it's hard to explain the details, but I sort of reach backwards through the stream of time, and grab something or someone by the soul, and give a little twist. Like this," he showed them with his hand. "And then the past changes, and so does everything that came after it."

"That's impossible" Night said.

"What do you mean?" Future replied, "I just did it to each of you."

With that the four elder siblings recoiled in awe. For lo and behold, now they realized that Future was right. Night was suddenly enchanted with the tendrils of starlight radiating through her infinite darkness, Murder's evil thoughts gave way to visions of Love, Chaos felt swept up in waves of Harmony, and Death gazed out upon the fields of Life with new eyes of yearning and wonder.

After a timeless pause in which it seemed that a whole new world was born, the now fabulous foursome stood up and said to Future, "you have given us much to meditate upon today, little one. Would you like anything from us in return?"



"Only to be part of your family," Future answered without hesitation.

The elder siblings looked at each with concern.

"My house is too dark for you," Night said.

"And mine is a prison," Death said.

"Oh, I'm not looking for a house," Future said, "I'm looking for a home."

"What is the difference, little brother?" Chaos asked.

"A house is a place where a family resides. A home is a family you carry in the heart."

"Good one," Murder said, "you are getting wise in your young age. Anything else?"

"Yes, whenever you meet a person in despair, tell them that I am your brother, and that I am searching for them."

"And if they ask where you are and when you will arrive?"

"Just say that you have no idea

when or where, but that you are certain that I will find them one day."

Chaos was abashed. "I am ashamed to say that I have only ever threatened people with your absence. Do you talk about us to people you meet?"

"Oh yes, most definitely," Future said with admiration. "I talk about you all the time, and how much good work you do. I tell people that Night is needed to give birth to the Dawn, that Chaos stimulates people to seek for a higher Harmony, that Murder is the first stirring of frustrated Love, and that Death is the gateway to a greater Life. I tell them that but for your labors, I could never arrive."

With that Future stood up and started to walk away.

"Where are you going?" his siblings called after him in surprise. "We accept you into our family."

"Thank you," he said, "I felt it. That's

why I am going now."

"Going where?"

Future stopped and pointed to the ridge of blue mountains that stood in the distance, far beyond the last outskirts of town. "Out there somewhere," he said, "I'm not sure yet. But it will be somewhere grand and glorious, somewhere mysterious that lies beyond the next horizon." Then he turned and walked slowly down the road. He looked so poised and alert as he went, his heart open, his spirits high, his will ready for whatever adventure might come to him from the immense Unknown.

Meanwhile his four siblings stood back, fretting among themselves as they watched him walk down the road, out of the city, and fade away into the distance.

"You see, the first language had many double meanings, so later on people mistranslated your names. Night is actually Light, and Murder is Love. Chaos is Harmony, and Death is Life."

"Oh my God!" Murder gasped, her heart full of angst, "there are so many dangers out there. He has no plan or preparation. He has no idea what he is getting into."

"No, no!" Night worried as she paced to and fro, "the sun will set soon and he will get lost in the darkness. He is all alone and has nothing to light his way. What are we going to do?"

"Somebody stop him," Chaos cried, her shaking voice causing each of her sibling's hearts to tremble. "Anything could go wrong at any minute! This is an absolute disaster! He's going to die!"

Death held up his fist and unleashed his thunderous voice, challenging any foe to battle. "There goes my little brother. If anyone or anything so much as lays a finger on him, you will have me to deal with. Do you hear me? You will have ME to deal with!"

And then Death wheeled and directed his full force at Chaos. "And what is wrong with dying?" he demanded.

There was a tense silence, during which it seemed that the siblings' newfound friendship was about to crumble—and then they all burst out laughing. It was good laughter, the laughter of joy and discovery. They hadn't laughed like that in ages, in fact maybe ever. After a few minutes of this, they turned and walked together down the road in the opposite direction, away from Future.

"Good one," Chaos told her older brother, "I definitely didn't see that coming."

"What's the world coming to?" Death complained. "These days even

kids know more than we do."

"You know,"

Night mused, "maybe she was a good mother after all."

"Aye, a very good mother,"

Murder concluded. "It appears she had a master plan all along."

"Isn't that the truth?" they agreed, as they continued to stroll and chat. "You know, we really ought to try to talk to her, the way Future described. What did he say—call her by her true name and ask for help? And 'behind the heart'—what the heck does that mean? There is so much to talk about now, but how are we going to find her?"

"No worries," the First Mother replied, "I'm already here. So, what was it that you wanted to discuss?"

Without missing a beat, Death seized the moment. "Well, Mother, Chaos and I have been counting and it seems to us like the number of souls in existence is increasing, and the cycle of reincarnation is accelerating."

"Right," she said, "sit down my children and let me explain that to you." And she did—but that is another story.



Aids and obstacles in Integral Yoga sadhana

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According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Integral Yoga does not proceed in any prescribed forms of practice, but by aspiration for the Divine, and inward or upward self-concentration and self-opening to Divine consciousness and power. Three interrelated processes comprise the unfoldment of the sadhana: aspiration for the Divine, discernment and rejection of all falsehood, and complete surrender to the Divine. There are always difficulties that obstruct or slow down the progress of yoga in its early stages. Typically resistance arises from two major sources: our embodied nature's ignorance, and hostile anti-Divine forces that take hold of our lower nature and distort our consciousness and progress on the path. This article summarizes some of the major factors that can help our progress in sadhana (such as equality, faith, silence, surrender, focused effort, sincerity, psychic being, etc.) as well as common pitfalls and hindrances (vital desires, attachments, ego-centeredness, fear, restlessness/anxiety, ill-will/hatred, inertia, doubt, hostile forces etc.). We will examine the challenges and catalysts associated with *aspiration*, *discernment* and *surrender*.

What is integral yoga?

The following excerpts from a 1934 statement by Sri Aurobindo (2006) succinctly describe the philosophy and practice of integral yoga::

The one aim of Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the one Self in all and evolve



a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinize human nature. (pp. 549-550)

Man lives mostly in his surface mind, life and body, but there is an inner being within him with greater possibilities to which he has to awake—for it is only a very restricted influence from it that he receives now and that pushes him to a constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power and knowledge. The first process of Yoga is therefore to open the ranges of this inner being and to live from there outward, governing his outward life by an inner light and force. In doing so he discovers in himself his true soul which is not this outer mixture of mental, vital and physical elements but something of the Reality behind them, a spark from the one Divine Fire. He has to learn to live in his soul and purify and orientate by its drive towards the Truth the rest of the nature. (p. 548)

In the past [yoga] has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit. Sri Aurobindo teaches that a descent of the higher principle is possible

which will not merely release the spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world.... The psychological discipline of Yoga can be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle. (p. 548)

Integral Yoga in relation to traditional yogas

Integral Yoga aims at integration of the whole person. This may be described as harmonization of the outer or embodied aspects of the individual human being (i.e. cognitive, affective, and behavioral); as well as the integration of the outer with the inner dimensions of being through the catalytic role of the embodied, evolving soul—the psychic being—on the one hand, and integration of the individual dimension with the cosmic and transcendent dimensions on the other hand. In other words, the unique personal or individual characteristics of the individual are taken into account and not simply transcended, but fully transformed.

Since the outer nature or personality makeup of each person is hardly balanced in its natural or untrained state, there are several possible starting points or approaches for the beginner. If the person is overdeveloped in his or her mental composition, mind-based yogas (e.g. raja yoga, mindfulness meditation, etc.) may be a natural starting point. For those naturally inclined toward feelings and affect the path of love or devotion (bhakti) would be a natural starting point. Similarly, those inclined towards action and pragmatism may be well suited to the path of service or works (karma yoga). There are additional paths such as kundalini yoga or tantric practices for those who are naturally in touch with the subtle body or subtle energies. According to Sri Aurobindo:



There is a combination of the old systems: the way of knowledge through the mind's discernment between Reality and the appearance, the heart's way of devotion, love and surrender and the way of works turning the will away from motives of self interest to the Truth and the service of a greater Reality than the ego. For the whole being has to be trained so that it can respond and be transformed when it is possible for that greater Light and Force to work in the nature. (p. 549)

Sri Aurobindo has pointed out that Integral Yoga begins where other yogas end or fulfill their function. This is because regardless of the natural variations in human temperament, the goal for all is to balance out and harmonize the various dimensions of the self toward the goal of total integrality and complete self-expression. Moreover, it is not possible to bypass the fundamentals of yogic practice and avoid the traditional challenges of the yogic path. As Sri Aurobindo put it:

There are many things belonging to older systems that are necessary on the way—an opening of the mind to a greater wideness and to the sense of the Self and the Infinite, an emergence into what has been called the cosmic consciousness, mastery over the desires and passions; an outward asceticism is not essential, but the conquest of desire and attachment and a control over the body and its needs, greeds and instincts is indispensable. (p. 549)

Integral Yoga is not a world-negating practice but it should not be confused with spiritual materialism, i.e., indulgence in worldly tendencies in the guise of spirituality, and requires lifelong commitment to self-discipline and self-transformation. It may be consid-

ered even more challenging as transformation of ego and embodied personality is incongruent with escapism and spiritual bypassing. In Sri Aurobindo's words, Integral Yoga

cannot be done at once or in a short time or by any rapid or miraculous transformation. Many steps have to be taken by the seeker before the supramental descent is possible... The process of this self-discipline or sadhana is therefore long and difficult, but even a little of it is so much gained because it makes the ultimate release and perfection more possible. (p. 548)

It is important to keep in mind that the process of sadhana is unique for each individual. Each person is a unique combination of outer personality factors, inner personality characteristics, and has a unique psychic personality. The outer personality is what is observable and has three key components: a physical body, a vital/emotional nature, and a mental component. In western psychological terms the body is associated with behavior, the vital nature corresponds to affect, and the mind is associated with cognition. Each individual is a unique combination of these three dimensions in his or her outward nature, often with one dominating the other two. Moreover, each individual is uniquely shaped by genetic, social and cultural factors. According to integral psychology however, the human psychic personality expresses the deepest level of individuality and uniqueness. It is due to this important dimension that even identical twins raised under equal family, social and cultural conditions are each unique individuals with a distinct trajectory of psychic and psychospiritual development.

Due to the significance of the principle of individual uniqueness in Integral Yoga there are no prescribed or general steps and stages of the sadhana.

However, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have pointed to three general phases of the process: aspiration for the Divine, discernment and rejection of that which is not Divine, and surrender to the Divine. Since the psychic being is a portion of the Divine is each human being, it is possible to also speak of the three phases as: a) aspiration and longing by the soul for the Divine, b) rejection of our base nature and egocentric consciousness, and c) surrendering our egoic consciousness to the Divine so that it can be transformed through the influence of the soul to an instrument of Divine consciousness, expression and action. This process is referred to as "psychic transformation" in Integral Yoga and implies that the soul/psychic being has a central role in guiding the process of sadhana.

Aspiration is an attitude of the psychic being—an act of the soul. It is not an egoic goal or ambition toward spiritual development. Therefore, first and foremost, an aspirant needs to access the soul through self-opening and succeed at centering one's consciousness at the center of the inner being. This in turn necessitates quieting of the mind, calming the vital body and being grounded firmly in the body. In short, even-mindedness and equanimity must be practiced and equality established throughout the whole being. The traditional practice of *samatha* (an ancient yogic practice also emphasized by Buddhist meditators) aims at calming the mind through concentration and one-pointedness until the subject and object of consciousness become unified resulting in *dhyanas*, or sustained one-pointedness and absorption, ultimately resulting in *samadhi* (complete absorption and stillness). Any number of objects of meditation may be chosen such as the breadth, rising and falling of the abdomen, hearing, walking, as well as external objects such as a point of light, a disk, or a mandala. Although associated with calm and various intensities of joy, this practice is not designed to



produce insights, knowledge or wisdom, but rather results in mindfulness, concentration, joy and equanimity.

Samatha and equality serve as an all-important foundation for the practice of 'introspection', a witness-consciousness type of meditation practice used by Sri Aurobindo for inner self observation. In *samatha* practice the mind is typically the subject of consciousness which is unified with various objects of meditation through the external or internal senses. With introspection, the subject of consciousness is ideally and eventually the soul or the psychic being. This innermost individual center of consciousness is always present subliminally, but is covered over by the grosser vibrations of the surface being; i.e., mental, vital, and physical movements. A shift is therefore needed from our usual mentally dominated consciousness toward the psychic center. While practice may begin with mindfulness on the mental level, it can be shifted inward and toward the psychic center and established therein. In short, for the beginner meditator and at the beginning of each meditation session for meditators of all levels of experience, equality is practiced and mindfulness is established until it becomes effortless. Then through silencing of the mind and quieting of the vital energies, consciousness is centered in the psychic being and over time becomes stabilized. Introspection involves sincere, dispassionate/detached, and non-judgmental self-observation allowing for discernment which results in rejection of all that is not Divine in our constitution. Discrimination along with continued effort in self-purification clear the way for a secure and complete surrender to the Divine.

Our ordinary waking consciousness is a mixture of mental, vital and physical movements without a unifying and integrating center. In some individuals the mind is more dominant, in others, the vital/emotional nature is prominent, and others are primarily physical/sensate in the constitution of the surface

being (Prakriti or outer nature). These three aspects may be at odds with another, with one dominating the others. This is why different forms of yoga may be helpful in the beginning. Over time and with the increasing ability of the yogi to access the psychic center it becomes increasingly possible to purify, balance, and harmonize these three aspects of the outer personality. Introspection enables the yogi to conduct a sincere self-examination and through discernment identify aspects of the self that need further purification and transformation through the catalytic influence of psychic consciousness.

Summary of aids and obstacles

In a book titled *A Practical Guide to Integral Yoga* (Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 1955/1991), a chapter is devoted to the topic of aids and obstacle to the sadhana with numerous quotations from various statements by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on this topic. In the sections below I have selected one or two quotations for each major aid or obstacle and have also associated them with aspiration, discernment, and surrender. It should be noted that most if not all of these are applicable to the entire process of the sadhana. However, it may be argued that some are more pertinent to certain phases of the process than others. For example, when it comes to the 'aids', aspiration must be strong and steady in the beginning, but should be well in place before surrender is possible; the same may be argued for faith, peace and tranquility. Similarly, personal effort and determination are no longer relevant during the surrender phase where by definition the egoic will is submitted to the Divine will.

Regarding the obstacles, inertia, restlessness, and attachment should have already been overcome before true surrender is possible. Personal will is needed during aspiration and discernment phases for purification and trans-

formation of egoic consciousness, and only a purified and stable ego should be surrendered, or surrender may not be sincere and complete. Lastly, when it comes to personal relationships, one must be quite discerning during the aspiration phase to guard against egoic motives, but through mastery of discernment and surrender one is able to create healthy relationships infused with spiritual consciousness.

The most relevant phase of sadhana to which the aid or obstacle pertains are abbreviated and appear in parentheses after the particular aid or obstacle (A=Aspiration, D=Discernment, S=Surrender).

Aids

Aspiration (A/D)

The aspiration must be intense, calm and strong but not restless and impatient, then alone it can be stable. You should aspire calmly eat, sleep, do your work. Peace is the one thing you have to ask for now it is only on the basis of peace and calm that the true progress and realisation can come. There must be no vital excitement in your seeking or your aspiration towards the Mother. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 85)

Faith (A/D)

Faith is something which one has before proof or knowledge and it helps you to arrive at knowledge or experience... —Sri Aurobindo (p. 89)

There are four kinds of faith: Mental faith combats doubts and helps to open to the true knowledge; vital faith prevents the attacks of the hostile forces or defeats them and helps to open to the true spiritual will and action; physical faith keeps one firm through all physical obscurity, inertia or suffering and helps to open to the foundation of the true consciousness; psychic faith opens to the direct touch of the Divine and helps to bring union and surrender. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 89)



Peace/ Tranquility (A/D)

The Divine Consciousness is at work to transform you and you must open to it in order to let it work freely in you. Be quiet always, calm, peaceful and let the Force work in your consciousness through the transparency of a perfect sincerity. It is only in quietness and peace that one can know what is the best thing to do. —The Mother (p. 101)

Personal Effort (A/D)

So long as there is not the full Presence and conscious working of the higher Force, some amount of the personal effort is indispensable. To do the sadhana for the sake of the Divine and not for one's own sake is of course the true attitude. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 102)

Determination (A/D)

The transformation of the external being is the most difficult part of the Yoga and it demands faith, patience, quietude and firm determination. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 149)

When the resolution has been taken, when you have decided that the whole of your life shall be given to the Divine, you have still at every moment to remember it and carry it out in all the details of your existence. —The Mother (p. 83)

Equanimity/Equality (A/D/S)

There can be no firm foundation in sadhana without equality. Whatever the unpleasantness of circumstances, however disagreeable the conduct of others, you must learn to receive them with a perfect calm and without any disturbing reaction. These things are the test of equality. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 87)

Meditation/Concentration (A/D/S)

The number of hours spent in meditation is no proof of spiritual progress. It

is a proof of your progress when you no longer have to make an effort to meditate. Then you have rather to make an effort to stop meditation: it becomes difficult to stop meditation, difficult to stop thinking of the Divine, difficult to come down to the ordinary consciousness. —The Mother (p. 97)

Psychic Being (A/D/S)

The psychic being can work from within, but, for the external being, in such an invisible and unconscious way as if it did not exist. In most cases, in almost all cases, in fact, the psychic being is asleep, as it were, not active at all, but in a kind of torpor. It is only by sadhana and persistent effort that one can arrive at a conscious

connection with one's psychic being. —The Mother (p. 105)

Sincerity (A/D/S)

As long as there is within the being the possibility of an inner conflict it means that there is still in him some insincerity. —The Mother (p. 107)

Joy (A/D/S)

It is the Divine Presence that gives value to life. This Presence is the source of all peace, all joy, all security. Find this Presence in yourself and all your difficulties will disappear. —The Mother (p. 263)

Surrender (A/S)

It is the first principle of our sadhana that surrender is the means of fulfilment and so long as ego or vital demand and desire are cherished, complete surrender is impossible. You have to go on rejecting the vital mixture every time it

rises. If you are steadfast in rejecting, it will lose more and more of its force and fade out. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 110)

The true, lasting quietness in the vital and the physical as well as in the mind, comes from a complete consecration to the Divine; for when you can no more call anything, not even yourself, yours, when everything, including your body, sensations, feelings and thoughts belong to the Divine, the Divine takes the entire responsibility of all and you have nothing more to worry about. —The Mother (p. 112)

Work/Service (A/S)

To work for the Divine is to pray with the body. —The Mother (p. 118)

The only work that spiritually purifies is that which is done without personal motives, without desire for fame or public recognition or worldly

greatness, without insistence on one's own mental motives or vital lusts and demands or physical preferences, without vanity or crude self-assertion or claim for position or prestige, done for the sake of the Divine alone and at the command of the Divine. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 113)

Silence (D/S)

It is only in silence that a true progress can be made; it is only in silence that one can rectify a wrong movement; it is only in silence that one can be of help to somebody else. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 105)

Obstacles

Inertia /torpor (A/D)

What stands in the way of course is always the vital ego with its ignorance and the pride of its ignorance and, the physical consciousness with its inertia which resents and resists any call to

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change and its indolence which does not like to take the trouble it finds it more comfortable to go on its own way repeating always the same old movements and, at best, expecting everything to be done for it in some way at some time. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 163)

Restlessness/worry (A/D)

In order to have Dhyana, the restlessness of the mind must be utterly settled, the intellect must become like a calm and waveless sea, not a ripple on its surface. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 114)

The true power is always quiet. Restlessness, agitation, impatience are the sure signs of weakness and imperfection. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 266)

Attachment/ Desire (A/D)

To become indifferent to the attraction of outer objects is one of the first rules of Yoga, for this non-attachment

liberates the inner being into peace and the true consciousness. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 121)

Desires are motions of weakness and ignorance and they keep you chained to your weakness and to your ignorance. It is the same with all the lower impulses, jealousy or envy, hatred or violence, because they do not belong to the true nature of the Divine. To conquer a desire brings more joy than to satisfy it. —The Mother (p. 122)

Depression/Despondency (A/D)

Depression prevents the Force from flowing through and calls in the adverse forces and gives them a chance to destroy the helpful formations that are made. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 123)

A depression is always unreasonable and it leads nowhere. It is the most subtle enemy of the Yoga. Be courageous and do not think so much of yourself. It

is because you make your little ego the centre of your preoccupation that you are sad and unsatisfied. To forget oneself is the great remedy for all ills. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 123)

Vanity/Pride (A/D)

Ambition and vanity are things so natural to the human consciousness they have even their use in ordinary life. But they have to be pushed out before one is far on this path otherwise they are very dangerous attendants and can pervert both aspiration and siddhi. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 148)

Fear (A/D)

Once you enter the path of Yoga you must get rid of all fears; the fears of your

anti-divine, not merely undivine; they make use of the lower nature, pervert it, fill it with distorted movements and by that means influence man and even try to enter and possess or at least entirely control him. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 144)

Sex (A/D)

All gross animal indulgence of sex desire and impulse would have to be eliminated; it could only continue among those who are not ready for the higher life or not yet ready for a complete spiritual living. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 155)

It is true that the sex centre and its reactions can be transformed and that an Ananda from above can come down to replace the animal sex reaction. The

sex impulse is a degradation of this Ananda. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 155)

This yoga is a spiritual battle; its very attempt raises all sorts of adverse forces and one must be ready to face difficulties, sufferings, reverses of all sorts in a calm unflinching spirit. —Sri Aurobindo

S p e e c h (A/D)

Speech is usually the expression of the superficial nature; therefore to throw oneself out too much in such speech wastes the energy and prevents the inward listening which brings the word of true knowledge. "Talk less and gain power" has essentially the same meaning; not only a truer knowledge, but a greater power comes to one in the quietude and silence of the mind. Sri Aurobindo (p. 156)

It is the control over oneself that is the first thing needed, and especially the control over one's tongue. If people could learn to keep silent how many troubles would be avoided!

It is a much greater and more fruitful austerity to control one's speech than to abolish it altogether. —The Mother (p. 158)

Hatred/Ill-will (A/D)

No doubt, hatred and cursing are not

mind, the fears of your vital, the fears of your body which are lodged in its very cells. One who seeks the transformation and is a follower of the Path, must become through and through fearless, not to be touched or shaken by anything whatever in any part of his nature. —The Mother (p. 136)

Food (A/D)

Do not trouble your mind about food. Take it in the right quantity (neither too much nor too little), without greed or repulsion, as the means given you by the Mother for the maintenance of the body, in the right spirit, offering it to the Divine in you. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 137)

Human Nature/Prakriti (A/D)

The lower nature is ignorant and undivine, not in itself hostile but shut to the Light and Truth. The hostile forces are



the proper attitude. It is true also that to look upon all things and all people with a calm and clear vision, to be uninvolved and impartial in one's judgments is a quite proper Yogic attitude. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 105)

Ego-centeredness/ Narcissism (A/D/S)

Those who are capable of extending the consciousness as wide as the world, become the world ; but those who are shut up in their little bodies and limited feelings stop at those limits ; their bodies and their petty feelings are to them their whole self. —The Mother (p. 135)

All ambition, pride and vanity must disappear from the thoughts and the feelings. All falsehood must be rejected from the speech, thought and action and all ostentation, arrogance and insolence. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 133)

Difficulties/ Disturbances (A/D/S)

This yoga is a spiritual battle; its very attempt raises all sorts of adverse forces and one must be ready to face difficulties, sufferings, reverses of all sorts in a calm unflinching spirit. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 127)

Vital (A/D/S)

The vital is too selfish to have any gratitude. The more it gets the more it demands and it takes everything as its right and every denial of what it wants as an injustice and an offence. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 163)

The lower vital has its place, it is not to be crushed or killed, but it has to be changed, "caught hold of by both ends", at the upper end a mastery and control, at the lower end a right use. The main thing

is to get rid of attachment and desire ; it is then that an entirely right use becomes possible. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 163)

Doubt (A/D/S)

There must be no part of the being, even the most external, anything that makes a reserve, anything that hides behind doubts, confusion and subterfuges, anything that revolts or refuses. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 67)

Mind (A/D/S)

The mind is not an instrument for knowledge. Its true role is to give a form, to initiate an action. It is mind that puts in order the different elements of the inspiration and organises the action...

The firm basis of all spiritual power is equanimity. You must not allow anything to disturb your poise: you can then resist every kind of attack. The only way to fail in your battle with the hostile forces is not to have a true confidence in the Divine help. —The Mother

Knowledge does not come from the mind. It comes from the profundities of the soul or from a higher consciousness. —The Mother (p. 152)

All things are the Divine because the Divine is there, but hidden not manifest; when the mind goes out to things, it is not with the sense of the Divine in them, but for the appearances only which conceal the Divine. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 151)

Hostile Forces (A/D/S)

Hostile forces attack every sadhak; some are conscious of it, others are not. Their object is either to influence the person or to use him or to spoil his sadhana or the work or any other motive of the kind. Their object is not to test, but their attack may be used by the guiding power as a test. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 140)

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Relationships (D/S)

Relations after taking to Yoga should be less and based on a physical origin or the habits of the physical consciousness and more and more on the basis of sadhana. —Sri Aurobindo (p. 152)

All that is based on human relationship is unstable and transient, mixed and unsatisfactory; it is only what is established in the Divine and through the Divine that can last and give satisfaction. —

The Mother (p. 153)

In conclusion, it is important to keep in mind that the integral path of spiritual de-

velopment is not linear or straightforward and is unique for each person and that yoga requires lifelong commitment to self-discipline and self-improvement. Integral yoga requires establishing a firm and balanced foundation in equality of the whole being and can only be accomplished through complete surrendering to the Divine. Egocentric consciousness must be transformed, not suppressed or bypassed, and a healthy self must be the foundation on which spiritual practice is based. The ego must be retained, but purified and made healthy and functional so it can be used as the instrument of the soul in fulfilling our highest spiritual aspirations which can be achieved through self-observation, discernment and self-purification before the Divine consciousness can fully manifest in our individual and collective consciousness.



On The Record of Yoga

By Lopa Mukherjee

Lopa has written a novel inspired by The Record of Yoga, called The Soma People, where the heroes are spiritual masters practicing all the magic Sri Aurobindo's yogic journal records.



Sri Aurobindo started keeping a journal of his yogic practices from the time he was released from jail, in 1909. The year he spent in jail became a turning point in his life. His main activity there was a one-pointed practice of yoga. When he was acquitted, he was not the fiery revolutionary anymore. His inner life was richer than his outer life. He wrote in his diary, almost every day, for the next fifteen years - through the early days in Pondicherry when he was in hiding, through Mother's first visit, when he wrote for the Arya, through the First World War, and Mother's permanent arrival... till his Siddhi in November 1926.

These notebooks have been in print since 2001 as the *Record of Yoga*, but are not as easy to access as his other writings. Imagine piecing together a dissertation from notes taken down in shorthand. The journals are hieratic texts, like the Vedas, full of seed sounds or beeja mantras. Sri Aurobindo has left these Sanskrit terms in their original; because for one, he was writing the diary for himself, but more importantly I believe, because of their vibrational energies. The researchers at the Sri Aurobindo Archives have created a glossary of terms, but these words translate with difficulty. Some of them need many English words to be explained, and some lose their nuances when translated to a single word.

The resemblance to the Vedas does not end here. These are notes for an adept who has experienced something, and would like to validate it from another source. The milestones achieved, the

difficulties conquered, the many facets of the practice can only make sense to one who is doing intense sadhana himself. The journals show us the 99% perspiration that Sri Aurobindo put in his practice, while his other writings carry the 1% inspiration.

We see Sri Aurobindo keeping a close watch of the results, like a scientist doing an experiment. Only here, he is himself the observer and the observed. He is detached, critical, appreciative, exacting, exact. He predicts events to the minute, jots down the successes and the errors. He analyzes the many mental and emotional forces that combine to produce one decision. He predicts the next move of a squirrel by reading the creature's mind and simultaneously prophesying the future. He cures somebody else's disease without his patient even knowing it. He directs world movements, sees writings in space, hears voices, poetry flows into him like a river, he makes his hair grow back where he has started balding. All this, without the help of herbs, chemicals, or any external prop. All he has is his clock; a radio to verify his actions in the world theatre, after they have occurred; a handful of sadhaks, some rare visitors; a pet dog, crows, squirrels, and insects he observes from his room.

But how does he conduct the experiments? The detailed processes are missing in the journal; the rest of his books speak of the processes. What he was writing down in one page of a notebook

he expound in 60 pages of the Arya. Now we have them as *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Future Poetry*, and so on. So how can we possibly read *The Record of Yoga*? Luckily for us, Sri Aurobindo's companions were eager to know what he was doing. So he wrote an introduction for them. Here he explained each seed sound, and why he had arranged them as he did. He said this system was revealed to him by the Master of Yoga. The program had seven simultaneous lines of development. Each had four qualities or faculties he had to work on. These spanned from the highest levels of consciousness to the lowest detail of the physical plane. In Sanskrit he called the program *Sapta Chatushtaya*, the Seven Quartets.

The qualities are for example, *samata* (equality), *brahma tejas* (energy of the seeker after knowledge), *virya* (courage). The faculties are tricky. They are classified as supernatural, paranormal, occult or magical, because they are currently inaccessible to most people. In the Indian tradition they are called *siddhis*. Since can be dangerous powers, Sri Aurobindo writes a caveat against their use. He also points out how they should not become the aim of the sadhana, that they are fruits of the perfection of the instrument. The instrument belongs to the Divine and can be used in whatever way He chooses. The instrument has to be always on the guard to refrain from obeying its egoistic demands. The most attractive and easily understandable parts of his diary are the ones related to his *siddhi* experiments.

The eight *siddhis*, or traditionally *ashtasiddhi*, are just one item out of the twenty-eight he was working on simultaneously. Another *siddhi*-like faculty is *trikaldrishti*, the knowledge of past, present and future, or more precisely as explained by Sri Aurobindo: direct knowledge of the past, intuitive knowledge of the present, prophetic knowledge of the future. When he was working on the *siddhis* of knowledge he was



reading the thoughts of people around him, of birds and insects. He was planting thoughts in their minds. Telepathy is the common term for this, but it does not encompass all that is involved in the siddhis of knowledge, called *prakamya* and *vyapti*. When he worked on the siddhis of power for example, he made one of his companions wake up and make tea for him, without anyone suspecting anything. He made the dog eat something the creature previously avoided. One of the siddhis he developed in the physical plane was defying gravity. He timed how long he could hold his arms horizontally, and noted which muscle complained, and when it did so. He went on doggedly till he could hold his arms for more than an hour. Thus he taught himself the principals of levitation.

The following are some excerpts from Sri Aurobindo's diary. The English meanings in parenthesis are pithy approximations of the real sense. For a better understanding one has to read Sri Aurobindo's introduction.

This entry involves *Lipi* (writing in space), *Vani* (sound), *vyapti* (knowledge communication), *trikaldrishti*:

Death of S.A's [Srinivasachari's] child. It was brought to me on the 29th or 30th Nov. On the 1st I had the *trikaldrishti* of its death; this was repeated three times in *Lipi*, "death["]", and confirmed in *Vani* Script "The child will die." On the 2d I got the *vyapti* of an improvement, confirmed by R [Ramaswamy], but at the same time the *trikaldrishti* that the improvement would be immediately followed by death. This has now been confirmed by the event. There was one imperfection, a suggestion from outside and a hope within, growing almost into confidence, that the *trikaldrishti*, in spite of so many confirmations, might not be true. Nevertheless, there came a warning not to indulge the hope, but wait the event. (p. 126)

Tejas (mental light and energy), *trikaldrishti*, *vyapti* (knowledge communication):

The promise has been fulfilled. The tejasic suggestion from the environment which interfered with the *trikaldrishti*, is now turning into power of *vyapti*; a bird in its flight, an ant in its turnings, feels the thought strike it and either obeys or is temporarily influenced in its immediate or subsequent action. Power is also increasing rapidly; the will is sometimes fulfilled at the very moment, almost with the act of going out; at other times more slowly, but still with far greater force & frequency than has ever been the case in the past; sometimes, however, with great delay & difficulty & in some cases not at all. A curious example shows how difficult the resistance now finds it to be effective; a crow sitting on a branch received the suggestion of going to the end of the branch, but the force in it was unwilling; it went a little way thence came rapidly back, & for some minutes began dancing on the branch this way & that, towards the end when the force was applied, away from it when it was relaxed, until it reached the point as if driven suddenly by physical force, seeming several times about to fall off the tree, & then fluttered off to another bough. (p. 135)

Prakamya (awareness from a distance), *trikaldrishti*, *viveka* (power of discrimination):

1. A squirrel on the roof-ridge descends the angle of the tiles, leaps on to the wall of the next house, runs along it & ascends its roof. The first motion seen in the squirrel's mind (*prakamya*) before it is executed, the second d[itt]o, the

third by *trikaldrishti* without any data objective or subjective.

2. The leaflike insect put yesterday on the smaller tree stated yesterday by S [Saurin] to be no longer on the tree, suggested that it was back among the bean-leaves. While searching for it with the eyes today, *trikaldrishti* that it was not in the bean plant & was, probably, still on the tree. No data. The certainty was absent. Half an hour later it was shown by N [Nolini] still on the tree.

3. A crow approaching the veranda another upon it. The idea of coming on the verandah seen in the crow's mind, but a suggestion of *trikaldrishti* that it would fly away to the wall on the left before reaching it. Uncertainty & false *viveka* mistaking the intention for the event. Suggestion at the last moment when the crow had paused just below the veranda to eat something, that something would happen to send it away rejected obstinately by false *viveka*. The next moment the first crow flew away to the wall on the left & the object of observation followed it. These three instances show the state of the *trikaldrishti*. Everything observed is the rendering in thought of a truth of tendency, intention, or event, but everything is not yet put easily in its correct place, & uncertainty about the actual event is the normal state of the mental being who cannot distinguish between the correct decision and a false choice. This stage has to be exceeded, before a clear & reliable *trikaldrishti* can be established. (p. 169)

Vyapti (knowledge communication), *prakamya* (awareness from a distance):

For some days there have been continual proofs of *vyapti* *praka-*



mya. eg the presence of an Austrian warship at Durazzo, the rumour of the Austrian consul being killed, etc. Yesterday there came in the mind the positive idea that Turkey had asked to be included in the Balkan Confederacy; today the same is given (in yesterday's evening paper reaching here this morning), as a strange piece of news from Constantinople and Sofia. This is striking as there was neither data nor probability & the knowledge, of the fact or rumour, came suddenly without previous thinking in that direction. *Vyapti* & *prakamya* of precise thought has begun to be frequent & often confirmed by the speech or action of the person or animal in whom it is perceived. Formerly only feeling & general thought used to come. *Vyapti* and *prakamya* are now abundant, continuous and almost perfect in arrangement, ie in assignment of its source & nature. (p. 120)

Satyam (truth), *vijnana* (higher mental faculty), *vijnanamaya* (of vijnana):

4. Series.

- a. B. [Bijoy] will come between 7.20 & 7.25. B. came at 7.23.
- b. S [Saurin] (?) will come at 7.40 exactly. N [Nolini] came at 7.40 exactly. S tried to come about that time.
- c. S (?) will come at 7.55. R. [Ramaswamy] came at 7.55.
- d. S will come at 8.5. Unfulfilled. S about this time was again thinking of coming
- e. S will come at 8.25 corrected 8.35. S came at 8.33.
- f. M [Moni] will come after S, last of all, but before 9. pm. fixed at 8.55 exactly. M came at 8.54 or 8.55. just after I sat down to meals at 8.52. Besides, the ideas of what

will happen or is the case in little details of the occurrences in the house are usually correct, but not always. The trend is to the *satyam* intellectual infallibility, for the direct *vijnanamaya* action is still held back in order to allow the mind to contract the habit of correctness, ie of not disfiguring by misapplication the truth from the *vijnana*. (p. 119)

Trikaldrishti, *prakamya vyapti* (knowledge from a distance), *pranic* (vital energy), *drishti* (sight):

An ant was climbing up the wall in an upward stream of ants; there was no sign of its reversing its progress; but the *trikaldrishti* saw that the ant would turn & go down, not upwards. At first it made a movement of uncertainty, then proceeded upward, then suddenly left the stream and went steadily & swiftly downwards. Afterwards the source of the *trikaldrishti* was seen, a coming movement of pranic energy, prepared in the sat-Brahman, latent both to the waking consciousness of the ant & my own, but caught by the *vijnanamaya drishti*. In another instance the same movement of energy was perceived in another ant and followed by an indicative movement, but it was also perceived that this was not the eventual impulse, & as a matter of fact a strong contrary tension intervened & carried the insect upward. In all these cases, the perception of the impulse by *prakamya vyapti* is not enough; the *vijnana* distinguishing the nature & fate of the tapas is required to constitute *trikaldrishti*. All error now consists in the absence of this distinguishing perception or in the false mental stress which tends to replace its unerring accuracy. (p. 291)

After the note on the 1st the diary was discontinued owing to the uncertainties in which the *sidhi* was still enveloped. All that has happened in the last few days confirms the view then taken; the stage is one of partial and combat-ed efficiency. Yet there are proofs of advance. Eg On the 8th night a swelling on the ankle & foot began, in the morning the whole of the left foot was attacked & it did not seem as if a speedy cure were possible. It was, however, indicated in the thought that it was merely an effect of impure *rasa* and not the disease common in these parts (*filiera*), would show no improvement during the day, would begin to go on the morrow and practically be got rid of the day after, but the remnants would be left. This prediction was fulfilled to the letter. Moreover, the swelling healed exactly as the will was applied, the part most insisted on improving first, the others more slowly. (p. 241)

Aishwarya (will acting on another), *ishita* (will to satisfy need), *tamas* (dullness), *vyapti* (knowledge communication), *akash* (space):

1. *Aishwaryam* on ant to give up its object and go back, done after a short persistence in the forward movement.
2. *Ishita* and *aishwaryam* for lessening of Saurin's diarrhoea, fulfilled as soon as made.
3. *Aishwaryam* for rapid restoration of health and strength, repeated and fulfilled on the 10th. Feb 10th.
4. *Aishwaryam* for M [Moni] to awake. Immediate success.
5. *Aishwaryam* for him to get up and give the tea. Succeeded after a slight resistance, lasting five to ten minutes.
7. *Aishwaryam* for the dog to shake off its heavy *tamas* and manifest



the new soul. Rapidly successful, but the *tamas* still struggles to remain & the old *bhava* in the face and body persists. A renewed *Aishwaryam* on the 11th. produces an immediate effect, the dog doing what it had never done before. Feb 11th

8. *Aishwaryam* of restored health & strength to S.[Saurin] succeeds, even the time coming correct.

11 *Aishwaryam* to stay nausea while eating. Immediately successful.

12. *Aishwaryam* to clear the stomach of disturbance and heaviness by working of *akash*. Successful.

Feb 13th or 14th

13. *Ishitasiddhi* for the dog to eat bread which it had always refused. Suddenly it began eating with relish after first refusing.

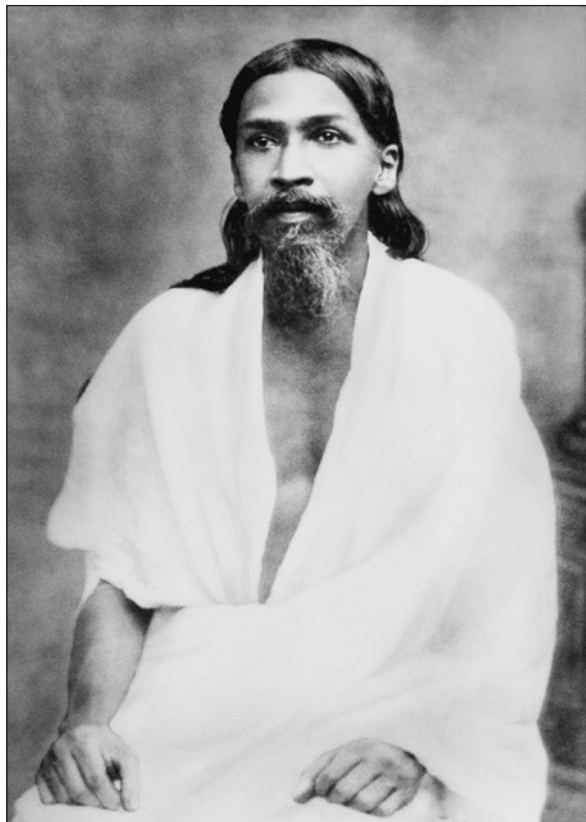
14. *Ishita* to refrain from large piece of bread given, but eat others. Persistently refrained even when it was broken into small pieces, except when induced to think it was not the same.

N.B. Previously many *ishitas* had succeeded, but were not noted down especially with regard to *vyapti* of yogic states or realisations into others or to people coming or not coming. (p. 42)

Saundarya (beauty):

Saundarya generally is forcefully obstructed & makes no progress; but in one detail there has been unexpected and rapid progress, a rounding off of the sharp angles of those fingers which were formerly square. This was noticed two or three days ago, but farther progress was sensible even in the course of a single day. In only two or three of the fingers are there

still traces of the old sharp angles. This isolated rapidity is a strong contrast to the occasional slow & slight progress covering many months & the usual failure of all success in other attempts of the psychic body to alter by mental force the physical sheath into its own image. (p. 282)



Sukshma (subtle), *anima* (power of the subtle world), *ananda* (joy), *vishaya*, *tivra*, *vaidyuta* & *raudra* (different types of joy):

Instances of *sukshma* touch & smell increased yesterday and also of physical *ananda*; the touch of a fly on the palm of the hand creating a thrill of combined *vishaya*, *tivra*, *vaidyuta* & *raudra* which continued for more than a minute though not with entire continuity. (p. 289)

Utthapana (anti-gravity), *laghima* (weightlessness), *mahima* (increased strength), *adhogati* (downward pull), *kamananda* (bodily pleasure), *rasagrahana* (tasting), *priti* (contentment), *saundarya* (beauty):

Today *utthapana* has been firmly resumed, after some futile beginnings in the past month, with the

horizontal position of the arms; the force of *laghima* and *mahima* has greatly increased in the interval of non-practice, the defect of *anima* diminished. At the first attempt (6 am) either arm maintained itself easily for 17 minutes or 15 with only a slight defect of *anima*, more in the left arm than the right, and a pressure of *adhogati* (gravity) that only became pronounced at the end. *Kamananda* is again increasing on the body. The Will has resumed its pressure on the body for *saundarya*. *Utthapana* of the left arm (horizontal position) resumed & continued from 10-49 to 11-49, one hour, the *adhogati* (gravity) asserting itself with some force, but much less than formerly, during the last ten minutes. Strong pain given to the system (burning in the eyelids by the flaming tip of a match, and muscular pain of indigestion in the breast & back) showed that the *sparshas* (touches) habitual[ly]

causing pain can no longer entirely shut out *ananda*, even when they are very powerful, but can temporarily overpower them. In all cases there is *rasagrahana*, but not *priti* or *ananda*. *Priti* is only beginning. (p. 328)

About the same time that Sri Aurobindo was experimenting with these tools of knowledge, the Mother was also exploring occultism. In the current age of easy access to information, we may not find it startling that their practices



were converging, but in the early 1900s in France, Mother had no access to anything Indian. There were just two connections, both unrelated to occultism. She had come across a French translation of the Bhagavad Gita, and had read Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*. She was thirsting for a deeper knowledge. She was then introduced to a journal called the *La Revue Cosmique*. It spoke of a Tradition that was hidden from common sight. It sounded promising. The *Revue* had narrations of someone's experiences in subtle realms. This person was Madame Elma Theon, who was a medium.

This was the age of Spiritism, channeling and planchette. And there was a reason why the world was ripe for it. Wars were being fought all around the earth, and thus there were many untimely deaths. People were eager to talk to their dear departed ones. Mediums could communicate with the dead souls. Soon, professional psychics sprang up, and there were as many quacks as genuine mediums. A famous follower of Spiritism was Sherlock Holmes' creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. His famous opponent was the magician Houdini, who could reproduce disembodied voices and levitated tables using trickery.

Sri Aurobindo himself explored automatic writing. He and some early disciples in Pondicherry sat around a table and waited for a dead soul to speak to them. Sri Aurobindo was the medium. After a while, people posed questions and his hand moved. The best result of these experiments was a set of yoga instructions, later compiled in a book called *Yogic Sadhan*. Sri Aurobindo did not put his name as author, but kept it as "Uttar Yogi"—a yogi from North India.

Mother also had her salon, but she was way ahead of her companions. Soon she was sharing her own spiritual experiences in the *Revue Cosmique*. Then in 1906 she went to meet Elma Theon and her husband, Max Theon, who became her teachers in Occultism. She lived with them in the secluded town of

Tlemcen in Algeria for six months. She said that every day was a new discovery. She returned again in 1907 for another session of intense practice. Mother spoke about her supernatural powers, but always guardedly. She did not teach occultism to anyone in the Ashram and has categorically told people to stay away from it. Without the protection of the guru, any slip could occur, and then one is finished for life. This same warning is given by Tantric gurus.

And what could the Mother not do with her occult knowledge! She could look at a photograph and know everything about the person's history, intentions, capacities. She could change a person's fate by looking at his eyes. She talked with the gods, and Lord Ganesha brought her wealth. She could bring down rain on any part of the earth, or stop it when she saw it fit. One of the signs of occult power is the capacity to heal. Jesus could heal with his hands. Pranic healers, energy workers, Reiki practitioners and some doctors have that siddhi too. Daoist monks could fly by working on their prana or chi. Now only martial art movies have flying warriors. Yoda taught Luke Skywalker to make things levitate through mind control. Are these just fiction? Or intuitions of the human past?

When we hear stories of the Mother with the Theons, we know these are possibilities. They could see what "beings" caused storms, and could reason with them to stop it. They could deflect lightning across the sky. Vegetables told them when they were ready to be plucked. They could speak to snakes, which means they knew Parcel tongue, just as Harry Potter did. They made tables rise and rush forward from a distance: telekinesis. They could materialize things from thin air, and be present at two locations, such as Tlemcen and Paris, at the same time. Beings, great and small, evil and good, they have controlled. These are dangerous worlds where even the adept need to be wary. Madame Theon

lost an eye fighting an occult battle. Max Theon could not protect her. Sri Aurobindo fractured his thigh protecting the Mother from such a being. So many practitioners have had their brains fried, have become addicts, or have committed vicious crimes.

Yoga has passed through stages. At first was the age of oligarchy where only a select few could practice it. Then came monarchy, controlled by the elite. Now it is democracy. Yoga is accessible to all. No arduous journey to remote monasteries are needed to read a text. No seeking for a guru, no doing his household chores for years to become deserving of knowledge. No writing by postal mail and asking around if a text is available. Not even a trip to the library or flipping through card catalogues. Sacred texts are digitized and uploaded in the World Wide Web. Internet search engines have not only solved the problem, but have gone a step further. You may not even know what you are seeking, but it shows up on your screen as a suggestion. Data Science has guessed what you need before you could articulate the need. Some mystery texts say you will be automatically pulled to them when you are ready. We may need to surrender to the modern version of the pull—the electromagnetic pull. At the same time we may need to be wary of the traps. When things come easily, they hurt easily too.

We can control our own evolution. And we can destroy it. Such are the exciting days we live in. Messages of hope and hate use the same conduits. Let the internet not replace the Shashtra. And let the Shashtra not replace the Practice. Let us enjoy our 99% perspiration.

The proper course of the Sadhan is just the opposite of the thing most people do... People begin with the body and the prana, go on to the chitta and the manas, and finish up with the buddhi and the will. The real course is to start with the will and finish with the body. (from *Yogic Sadhan* edited by the Uttara Yogi)



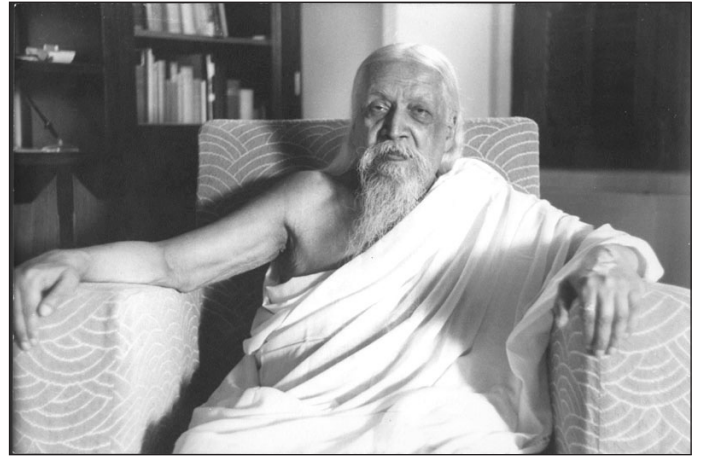
Source Material

The powers of darkness

by Sri Aurobindo

It was for a long time held by the human mind as a traditional knowledge that when we go beyond the material plane, these things are found to exist there also in worlds beyond us. There are in these planes of supraphysical experience powers and forms of vital mind and life that seem to be the prephysical foundation of the discordant, defective or perverse forms and powers of life-mind and life-force which we find in the terrestrial existence. There are forces, and subliminal experience seems to show that there are supraphysical beings embodying those forces, that are attached in their root-nature to ignorance, to darkness of consciousness, to misuse of force, to perversity of delight, to all the causes and consequences of the things that we call evil. These powers, beings or forces are active to impose their adverse constructions upon terrestrial creatures; eager to maintain their reign in the manifestation, they oppose the increase of light and truth and good and, still more, are antagonistic to the progress of the soul towards a divine consciousness and divine existence. It is this feature of existence that we see figured in the tradition of the conflict between the Powers of Light and Darkness, Good and Evil, cosmic Harmony and cosmic Anarchy, a tradition universal in ancient myth and in religion and common to all systems of occult knowledge.

The theory of this traditional knowledge is perfectly rational and verifiable by inner experience, and it imposes itself if we admit the supraphysical and do not cabin ourselves in the acceptation of material being as the only reality. As there is a cosmic Self and Spirit pervading and upholding the universe and its beings, so too there is a cosmic Force that moves all things, and on this original cosmic Force depend and act many cosmic Forces that are its powers or arise as forms of its universal action. Whatever is formulated in the universe has a Force or Forces that support it, seek to fulfil or further it, find their foundation in its functioning, their account of success in its success and growth and domination, their self-fulfilment or their prolongation of being in its victory or survival. As there are Powers of Knowledge or Forces of the Light, so there are Powers of Ignorance and tenebrous Forces of the Darkness whose work is to prolong the reign of Ignorance and Inconscience. As there are Forces of Truth, so there are Forces that live by the Falsehood and support it and work for its victory; as there are powers whose life is intimately bound up with the existence, the idea and the impulse of Good, so there are Forces whose life is bound up with the existence and



the idea and the impulse of Evil. It is this truth of the cosmic Invisible that was symbolised in the ancient belief of a struggle between the powers of Light and Darkness, Good and Evil for the possession of the world and the government of the life of man;—this was the significance of the contest between the Vedic Gods and their opponents, sons of Darkness and Division, figured in a later tradition as Titan and Giant and Demon, Asura, Rakshasa, Pisacha; the same tradition is found in the Zoroastrian Double Principle and the later Semitic opposition of God and his Angels on the one side and Satan and his hosts on the other,—invisible Personalities and Powers that draw man to the divine Light and Truth and Good or lure him into subjection to the undivine principle of Darkness and Falsehood and Evil. Modern thought is aware of no invisible forces other than those revealed or constructed by Science; it does not believe that Nature is capable of creating any other beings than those around us in the physical world, men, beasts, birds, reptiles, fishes, insects, germs and animalculae. But if there are invisible cosmic forces physical in their nature that act upon the body of inanimate objects, there is no valid reason why there should not be invisible cosmic forces mental and vital in their nature that act upon his mind and his life force. And if Mind and Life, impersonal forces, form conscious beings or use persons to embody them in physical forms and in a physical world and can act upon Matter and through Matter, it is not impossible that on their own planes they should form conscious beings whose subtler substance is invisible to us or that they should be able to act from those planes on beings in physical Nature. Whatever reality or mythical unreality we may attach to the traditional figures of past human belief or experience, they would then be representations of things that are true in principle. In that case the first source of good and evil would be not in terrestrial life or in the evolution from the Inconscience, but in Life itself, their source would be supraphysical and they would be reflected here from a larger supraphysical Nature.



This is certain that when we go back into ourselves very deep away from the surface appearance, we find that the mind, heart and sensational being of man are moved by forces not under his own control and that he can become an instrument in the hands of Energies of a cosmic character without knowing the origin of his actions. It is by stepping back from the physical surface into his inner being and subliminal consciousness that he becomes directly aware of them and is able to know directly and deal with their action upon him. He grows aware of interventions which seek to lead him in one direction or another, of suggestions and impulsions which had disguised themselves as original movements of his own mind and against which he had to battle. He can realise that he is not a conscious creature inexplicably produced in an unconscious world out of a seed of inconscient Matter and moving about in an obscure self-ignorance, but an embodied soul through whose action cosmic Nature is seeking to fulfil itself, the living ground of a vast debate between a darkness of Ignorance out of which it emerges here and a light of Knowledge which is growing upwards towards an unforeseen culmination. The Forces which seek to move him, and among them the Forces of good and evil, present themselves as powers of universal Nature; but they seem to belong not only to the physical universe, but to planes of Life and Mind beyond it. The first thing that we have to note of importance to the problem preoccupying us is that these Forces in their action seem often to surpass the measures of human relativity; they are in their larger action superhuman, divine, titanic or demoniac, but they may create their formations in him in large or in little, in his greatness or his smallness, they may seize and drive him at moments or for periods, they may influence his impulses or his acts or possess his whole nature. (*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vols. 21-22, *The Life Divine*, pp. 624-627)

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There are two kinds of Asuras—one kind were divine in their origin but have fallen from their divinity by self-will and opposition to the intention of the Divine: they are spoken of in the Hindu scriptures as the former or earlier gods; these can be converted and their conversion is indeed necessary for the ultimate purposes of the universe. But the ordinary Asura is not of this character, is not an evolutionary but a typical being and represents a fixed principle of the creation which does not evolve or change and is not intended to do so. These Asuras, as also the other hostile beings, Rakshasas, Pisachas and others resemble the devils of the Christian tradition and oppose the divine intention and the evolutionary purpose in the human being; they don't change the purpose in them for which they exist which is evil, but have to be destroyed like the evil. The Asura has no soul, no psychic being which has to evolve to a higher state; he has only an ego and usually a very powerful ego; he has a mind, sometimes even a highly intellectualised

mind; but the basis of his thinking and feeling is vital and not mental, at the service of his desire and not of truth. He is a formation assumed by the life-principle for a particular kind of work and not a divine formation or a soul. (CWSA, Vol. 28, *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 466)

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The Asuras and Rakshasas etc. do not belong to the earth, but to supraphysical worlds; but they act upon the earth life and dispute the control of human life and character and action with the Gods. They are the Powers of Darkness combating the Powers of Light.

Sometimes they possess men in order to act through them, sometimes they take birth in a human body. When their use in the play is over, they will either change or disappear or no longer seek to intervene in the earth-play. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 465-466)

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Yes, they [the hostile forces] have their own world and, if they kept to it, there could be no objection to their existence. There is a world that is natural to them and has its own rhythm, its own dharma—just as the lesser gods have theirs. But, they want to dominate the evolution and for that purpose they have taken their station in the vital worlds which influence the earth nature and give it its materials for life.

They were created or rather manifested like other orders of being as a type or several types expressing some cosmic stress, some possibility in the Infinite, the expression of a certain kind of consciousness and force. When the work that they are permitted to do on earth, the work of negation, perversion, miscreation is finished they will be destroyed here, but there is no reason to suppose that they may not exist in their own universe, as it were, outside the system here. For here their presence is an Adharma, a disturbance of the true harmony and natural evolution there should be on the earth plane; it is an intrusion and not a natural presence.

How did the Ignorance come into being out of sachchidananda? Or ego? The Hostile Forces in their own world embody ego self-fulfilled and having its own free play—ego on earth is not self-fulfilled and not meant to be, it is in conflict with a cosmic Force greater than itself and is only a temporary expedient for bringing forth individuality out of the indeterminateness of just conscient life and inconscient Matter. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 462-463)

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If there were no hostile forces and there were still the evolutionary world, there could be ignorance still but not perversity in the ignorance. All would be a partial truth acting through imperfect instruments but for the best purposes of this or that stage in a progressive manifestation. (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 463)

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The hostile Forces are Powers of Darkness who are in revolt against the Light and the Truth and want to keep this world under their rule in darkness and ignorance. Whenever anyone wants to reach the Truth, to realise the Divine, they stand in the way as much as possible. But what they are specially against is the work the Mother and myself are doing, to bring down the Light here into the earth and establish the Truth—that would mean their own expulsion. So they always try to destroy the work as a whole and to spoil the sadhana of each sadhak. It is not only you who are attacked: all are attacked more or less— especially when there is a great progress, these forces try to interfere. The only way to avoid it is to be entirely turned towards the Mother and to refuse any opportunity to these Forces. (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 465)

It [the adverse force] is the Power that keeps up ignorance and darkness in the world—it can only be destroyed when mankind is no longer in love with ignorance and darkness. Each sadhak has to push it out of contact with his being. When it has gone from him, then there will be no longer any serious difficulties in his sadhana. (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 465)

The conversion of the Asuras

by the Mother

There were four great Asuras. Out of the four, two are converted. They are taking part in the divine work. The other two are holding out well. How long will they hold out? We shall see. So, they have the choice between being converted, that is, taking their place, poised, in the whole totality or else being dissolved, that is, being re-absorbed by their origin.

There is one of them who has almost attempted conversion and not succeeded. When it had to be done, it seemed to him quite unpleasant. So he has put it off till another time.

As for the other, he refuses to try. He has taken up a very, very important position in the world, because people who don't know things call him "Lord of the Nations". In fact, I was speaking a while ago about the forces which govern the world and don't want to give up their rule at all. They are perfectly satisfied with it—it is not that he does not know that his end will come one day, but still he always postpones it as long as he can.

But as they do not have human dimensions, it can go on for quite a long time, can't it? As long as they find somewhere upon earth a human consciousness ready to respond to their influence, they will remain. So you can imagine the problem! Now it is not through individuals, it is through nations that they exert their influence. [...]

Which are the two forces that are already converted ?



Do you know the four Asuras ? ...

You said there were four divine forces: Love, Light, Truth and the opposite of Death.

And what?

(Another child, laughing) Life!

Ah!

Then these four forces separated from the Divine and changed into falsehood ...

Yes, it is something like that ! It is something like that !

Light or Consciousness, Ananda or Love, Life and Truth. Then Light or Consciousness became Darkness and Inconscience. Love and Ananda became Hatred and Suffering, and Truth became Falsehood, and Life became Death. Well, it is the first two... but not exactly in the same conditions. The first is converted and works, but he has refused to take a human body, he says it is a limitation in his work; perhaps one day he will take one, but for the time being he refuses. The second is converted and has of his own will been dissolved. He has dissolved into his origin. And the last two are holding out well.

The one of Death tried to incarnate. But he could not get converted. He tried to incarnate, which is something very rare. But it was a partial, not a total incarnation. That is difficult for them, a total incarnation. Human bodies are quite small, human consciousnesses are too small.

As for the other, he has emanations which are very active in certain human bodies and have played a big role in the recent history of the earth!

Don't the Asuras quarrel among themselves?

Oh yes, oh yes! just like men who are under asuric influences. They are the worst enemies among themselves. We must say it is a blessing, for if they had an understanding, things would be much more difficult. Perhaps it is so just because it is a law of equilibrium that governs the world. It is in order to lessen the strength of their influence. But still ... That Lord of Falsehood has truly a lot of influence. This is what catches you with a contagion as strong as that of contagious diseases. Stronger still! (*CWM 2003, Vol. 6, pp. 171-174*)



* * *

When Hitler died, did the Lord of Falsehood pass into Stalin?

It is not altogether like that that things happen, but it is something similar. This being did not wait for Hitler's death, it is there you make a mistake. These beings are not at all tied to a single physical presence. The being in question could very well possess Hitler and at the same time influence many others. Hitler was got rid of because he had behind him a whole nation and a physical power, and if he had succeeded it would have been a disaster for humanity, but there was no deluding oneself about it; it was not sufficient to get rid of him in order to get rid of the force that was behind him—that is not so easy. I must tell you that the origin of these beings is prior to that of the gods; they are the first emanations, the first individual beings of the universe; so they cannot be got rid of so easily, by winning one war.

As long as they are necessary for the universal evolution they will exist. The day they lose their utility, they will be converted or will disappear.

Besides, they know that they are nearing their last hour and that is why they are doing as much damage as they can.

There were four of them. The first one has been converted, another is dissolved into its origin. Two are still living and these two are more ferocious than the others. One is known in occultism as the "Lord of Falsehood" (I have told you this) the other is the "Lord of Death". And as long as these two beings exist, there will be difficulties. (CWM 2003, Vol. 4, p. 188)

* * *

When a being is possessed by a hostile force, what becomes of his psychic?

It depends on the degree of the possession. Usually it is something progressive. First there is an influence under which one comes, and comes in a fragmentary way, not even totally in his being, but in certain parts and for a time. This is the first stage. The second: the influence becomes permanent and there is one part of the being which deteriorates, which is constantly under this influence and expresses it. After this, the being which has cast this influence tries to enter that part. Then, usually, this produces a conflict, a kind of inner battle. People have fits, sometimes even nervous morbid fits. In trying to resist, the two parts of the being come constantly into conflict, and this produces great imbalance, even physical imbalance. But if one doesn't know how to resist and doesn't succeed in shaking off the hold, then gradually the being that has seized upon a part of the person acts like an octopus and spreads its tentacles like that, slowly and everywhere; and finally it is a total possession. At the moment of the total possession, either the possessed person becomes completely unbalanced or he becomes a kind of monster and his psychic being leaves him.

These cases are extremely rare, fortunately. Usually, in the human being the psychic is strong enough to be able to resist, and the most frequent case is that of constant conflict between the two parts, until the psychic being, if it is strong enough and knows how to lean on a greater strength than its own, is capable of rejecting this influence and freeing itself. It is only in an extreme case of a total possession that the psychic being goes away. But these are extremely rare cases, extremely rare. It sometimes happens that a child is still-born, that is, just at the moment of birth it dies or a few minutes later, or an hour or two later, you see, just at that time. In these cases it happens that it is the psychic being which has decided not to use this body. But if, for example, the doctor who is looking after the case is a clever man or the nurse a clever person and they can bring back life into the body by artificial respiration or such means, most often it is a hostile being which gets hold of this body. There have been cases like that, children who seemed to be dead, that is, the psychic being had left the body, and before it had died completely, a vital being had entered and taken its place. Such cases have been known. And these beings are demons. In life they become veritable demons. There are not many of them.

There are beings of the vital, but of a higher kind, emanations of Asuras, for example, who have decided for one reason or another that they would try to be converted, not to be antidivine, and manage to enter into relation with the Divine. They know that the best way is to identify themselves with a human body in order to be under the control of a psychic being. And they incarnate in human bodies, but not with the intention of driving out the psychic being, on the contrary, to try to submit to the influence of the psychic being and, be converted by it. These cases also are not frequent, but still they have been known, and in these cases these human beings are gifted with very exceptional capacities, but usually they also have very exceptional difficulties, because the power which has incarnated in them is one which was, at least, if it is not still so, a hostile power; and, you see, it is difficult to get rid of all these movements of revolt immediately; sometimes it takes a whole lifetime to succeed in doing it.

Some of these asuric beings have tried to convert themselves and not succeeded. They ought to have left the body they had chosen, because they could not convert themselves. It was too difficult a task for them, it demanded too great an effort.

But all these cases about which I have just spoken to you are very rare ones, you see. We can't say that such things happen and are met with at every turn: a gentleman who is the incarnation of an adverse force or another who is possessed. Such cases are very rare, very rare.

But the case of an influence—being under an influence and expressing it—this, unfortunately, is very frequent, especially with people who undertake yoga without being suf-



ficiently purified beforehand, or otherwise with egoistic intentions; to people who begin to do yoga for reasons of ambition or vanity it happens very often that they put themselves under the influence of certain adverse forces.

And there are also many people who are under certain influences in a way ... how to put it? ... one can't call it accidental, but... for example, there are psychic beings who choose a certain environment to incarnate in because they think that there they will have the experiences they want, and owing to some circumstances in this environment there is a hostile influence at work; so the body they put on is to a certain extent under this hostile influence and they have to fight against that terribly all their life. They can at a particular moment, as I said—if they know how to rely on greater forces than their own—they can conquer and gain a great victory. It is a great victory to get rid of the influence of an adverse force. It is truly a victory which goes beyond the individual's own person and has a repercussion on the whole terrestrial state. Each victory gained like this by an individual over a hostile force influencing him, is a long step forward to the day when the earth will be completely free of the presence of hostile forces. It represents a great progress for the earth.

Sweet Mother, how can the hostile forces be converted?

Well, if they want to, why can't they? There is nothing in the universe which doesn't have one single origin—that is, a supreme origin—the hostile forces like everything else; and if they give up their revolt and separation and aspire to return to their source, they can very well be converted. It may require much more effort from them than is necessary for a human being to change his defects, that of course is obvious. It is a much greater effort and, above all, much deeper, because the origin of their revolt is very deep; it is not superficial. But still, they can manage it. They have the power also; these are very powerful beings who, if they resolve to be converted, can do it; and then they become some of the most wonderful instruments for the divine work. The very ones who were some of the greatest adversaries. (CWM 2003, Vol. 6, pp. 434-437)

* * *

But why is man a centre of attraction for the adverse forces? He is so limited!

Yes, Also they do not usually work upon one man. But they try to get hold of the earth-atmosphere, you understand, and without getting hold of men, they can't get hold of the earth-atmosphere, because it is in man that the highest terrestrial force manifests. As for taking a human body for conversion, that indeed is quite... the answer is quite simple. It is because in man there is a psychic being and there is no Asura who can eternally resist the influence of the psychic being, even were he to refuse as much as he could to surrender and bind himself closely. That's exactly the contradiction of their existence. (CWM 2003, Vol. 6, p. 174)

Poetry room

From Savitri, "The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life"

This realm inspires us with our vaster hopes;
Its forces have made landings on our globe,
Its signs have traced their pattern in our lives:
It lends a sovereign movement to our fate,
Its errant waves motive our life's high surge.
All that we seek for is prefigured there
And all we have not known nor ever sought
Which yet one day must be born in human hearts
That the Timeless may fulfil itself in things.
Incarnate in the mystery of the days,
Eternal in an unclosed Infinite,
A mounting endless possibility
Climbs high upon a topless ladder of dream
For ever in the Being's conscious trance.
All on that ladder mounts to an unseen end.
An Energy of perpetual transience makes
The journey from which no return is sure,
The pilgrimage of Nature to the Unknown.
As if in her ascent to her lost source
She hoped to unroll all that could ever be,
Her high procession moves from stage to stage,
A progress leap from sight to greater sight,
A process march from form to ampler form,
A caravan of the inexhaustible
Formations of a boundless Thought and Force.
Her timeless Power that lay once on the lap
Of a beginningless and endless Calm,
Now severed from the Spirit's immortal bliss,
Erects the type of all the joys she has lost;
Compelling transient substance into shape,
She hopes by the creative act's release
To o'erleap sometimes the gulf she cannot fill,
To heal awhile the wound of severance,
Escape from the moment's prison of littleness
And meet the Eternal's wide sublimities
In the uncertain time-field portioned here.
Almost she nears what never can be attained;
She shuts eternity into an hour
And fills a little soul with the Infinite;
The Immobile leans to the magic of her call;
She stands on a shore in the Illimitable,
Perceives the formless Dweller in all forms
And feels around her infinity's embrace.
Her task no ending knows; she serves no aim



But labours driven by a nameless Will
That came from some unknowable formless Vast.
This is her secret and impossible task
To catch the boundless in a net of birth,
To cast the spirit into physical form,
To lend speech and thought to the Ineffable;
She is pushed to reveal the ever Unmanifest.
Yet by her skill the impossible has been done:
She follows her sublime irrational plan,
Invents devices of her magic art
To find new bodies for the Infinite
And images of the Unimaginable;
She has lured the Eternal into the arms of Time.

—Sri Aurobindo

The meaning of Man¹

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

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

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

These and all the works of man may he who will behold,
Mighty shapes of bygone beauty, songs of beaten gold,
Starlike thoughts that once, in ages gone, were found by seer-
 sages,
All the throng'd and murmuring Past, the life men loved of
 old.
Yet sometimes at the birth of night when hours of heat and
 splendour
Melt away in darkness, and the flaming sun has set
Across the brooding soul will sweep, like music sad and
 tender,

Sudden waves of almost passionate regret,
For then the hills and meadowlands, the trees and flowerful
 grasses,
All the world of wonder that our eyes have gazed upon,
Seems remote and mournful, as a rainbow when it passes
Leaves the heart lamenting for the beauty come and gone,
And in the deep that is the soul there surges up a cry
'Whence are all the starry legions traversing the sky?
Whence the olden planets and the sun and moon and earth?
Out of what came all of these and out of what came I?'
And far away within the same unfathomable deep
Comes an answer rolling 'Earth and moon and sun,
All that is, that has been, or that ever time shall reap,
 Is but moving home again, with mighty labours done,
 The Many to the Everlasting One.'

And this is the meaning of man,
 The task of the soul,
The labour of worlds, and the plan
 That is set for the whole,
For the spark of the spirit imprisoned within it,
 In all things one and the same,
Aeon by aeon and minute by minute,
 Is longing to leap into flame,
To shatter the limits of life and be lost in a glory intense
 and profound
As the soul with a cry goes out into music and seeks to be
 one with the sound.

For as those that are sunken deep
In the green din ocean of sleep,
In a thousand shapes for a thousand ages the one great
 Spirit is bound.
The air we inhale and the sea,
 The warm brown earth and the sun,
Came forth at the Word of the One
From the same First Mother as we,
And now, as of old when the world began
The stars of the night are the kindred of man,
For all things move to a single goal,
The giant sun or the thinking soul,
Ah what though the Tree whose rise and fall
Of sap is fed from the Spirit of All,
With suns for blossoms and planets for leaves,
Be vaster yet than the mind conceives?
Earth is a leaf on the boundless Tree,
And the unborn soul of the earth are we.

O man is a hungering exiled people, a host in an unknown
 land,
A wandering mass in the vast with only a black horizon to face,



Yet still, though we toil for a time in the heat over measure-
less deserts of sand
The longing for beauty that shines in the soul is the guiding-
star of the race.
It is this that alone may redeem
A world ignoble with strife,
This only rings all that we dream
From the shattered chaos of life.
And this that forever shall spur us and lead us from peak
unto peak on the way
Till body and spirit be welded in one and the long Night fall
on the Day,
And all the sonorous music of time, the hills and the woods
and the wind and the sea,
The one great song of the whole creation, of all that is and
that yet shall be,
Chanted aloud as a paean of joy by the Being whose home is
the vast
Shall tremble away in silence, and all be gone at last,
Save only afar in the Heart of the Singer of whom it was
chanted and heard
Remembrance left of the music as a sunset-fire in the west,
Remembrance left of the mighty Enchanted Palace that rose
at His Word,
This, and a joy everlasting, an immense inviolate rest.

—Clifford Bax

The building and pinnacle of the temple²

Not made with hand, its walls began to climb
From roots in Life's foundations deeply set,
Far down amid primaeval forms, where yet
Creation's Finger seemed to grope in slime.
Yet not in vain passed those first-born of Time,
Since each some presage gave of structure met
In higher types, lest these the bond forget
That links Earth's latest to the fore-world's prime
And living stone on living stone was laid,
In scale ascending ever, grade on grade,
To that which in its Maker's eyes seemed good—
The Human Form: and in that shrine of thought,
By the long travail of the ages wrought,
The Temple of the Incarnation stood.

Through all the ages since the primal ray,
Herald of life, first smote the abysmal night
Of elemental Chaos, and the might
Of the Creative Spark informed the clay,
From worm to brute, from brute to man—its way
The Shaping Thought took upward, flight on flight

By stages which Earth's loftiest unite
Unto her least, made kin to such as they.
As living link, or prophecy, or type
Of purpose for fulfilment yet unripe,
Each has its niche in the supreme design;
Converging to one Pinnacle, whereat
Sole stands Creation's Masterpiece—and that
Which was through her—the Human made Divine.

—Ellen Mary Clerke

Seeking³

I looked for you beyond the ways,
Beyond the seas and skies;
And when I'd gone the round of all,
I found you in my eyes.

And in my heart's deep inmost cave
Your Love's sweet presence stood,
A flame of golden ecstasy,
And white beatitude.

I went the round of all the world,
And tried each luring faith,
And never dreamt I'd find you furled
Within this body's swathe.

O hidden Sun within my night,
Moon-nectar in my breast,
Star-eye within my inward sight,
Who make yet all my quest

Turn outward through the seas and skies,
Till everywhere I see
The Love that dwells within my eyes
Feed all things secretly;

And all impassioned que stings cease
Within the flaming Sun,
Within the beauty of the peace
Where you, all, I are one.

—Themis

1. Jacobs, Alan (Ed.). *Poetry for the Spirit*. London: Watkins Publishing, 2002.
2. Ibid.
3. Hofman, L. & Vignan Agni (Eds.). *Devotion*. Auroville: Integral Enterprise, 2007.



Apropos

The power needed in yoga is the power to go through effort, difficulty or trouble without getting fatigued, depressed, discouraged or impatient and without breaking off the effort or giving up one's aim or resolution. —Sri Aurobindo

To live in a great aspiration, to take care to become inwardly calm and remain so always as far as possible, to cultivate a perfect sincerity in all the activities of one's being—these are the essential conditions for the growth of the psychic being. —The Mother

Every hardship; every joy; every temptation is a challenge of the spirit; that the human soul may prove itself. The great chain of necessity wherewith we are bound has divine significance; and nothing happens which has not some service in working out the sublime destiny of the human soul. —Elias A. Ford

It is through solving problems correctly that we grow spiritually. We are never given a burden unless we have the capacity to overcome it. If a great problem is set before you, this merely indicates that you have the great inner strength to solve a great problem. There is never really anything to be discouraged about, because difficulties are opportunities for inner growth, and the greater the difficulty the greater the opportunity for growth.—Peace Pilgrim

Imagine that every person in the world is enlightened but you. They are all your teachers, each doing just the right things to help you learn perfect patience, perfect wisdom, perfect compassion. —Buddha

All wilderness seems to be full of tricks and plans to drive and draw us up into God's light. —John Muir

Learn to get in touch with the silence within yourself and know that everything in this life has a purpose. There are no mistakes, no coincidences. All events are blessings given to us to learn from. —Elizabeth Kübler-Ross

Silence of the heart is necessary so you can hear God everywhere—in the closing of a door, in the person who needs you, in the birds that sing, in the flowers, in the animals. —Saint Mother Teresa

The moment one gives close attention to any thing, even a blade of grass it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself. —Henry Miller

Every breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment. —Thich Nhat Hanh

Where and when God finds you ready, he must act and overflow into you, just as when the air is clear and pure, the sun must overflow into it and cannot refrain from doing that. —Meister Eckhart

We need silence to be alone with God, to speak to him, to listen to him, to ponder his words deep in our hearts. We need to be alone with God in silence to be renewed and transformed. Silence gives us a new outlook on life. In it we are filled with the energy of God himself that makes us do all things with joy. —Saint Mother Teresa

Pay no attention [to your thoughts]. Don't fight them. Just do nothing about them, let them be, whatever they are. Your very fighting them gives them life. Just disregard. Look through. You need not stop thinking. Just cease being interested. Stop your routine of acquisitiveness, your habit of looking for results and the freedom of the universe is yours. —Nisargadatta

A man is the facade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide.... the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

