

Collaboration

Winter 2016/2017

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 41, No. 3



Hey, soul sisters! by Rick Lipschutz with Amanda Emerson •
Breaking down a dream feeling by Douglas McElheny •
Max Theon's influence on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother by Arthur Fielder •
Evolution and the emergence of human unity by Larry Seidlitz •
The descending path by James Anderson • Gratitude by Navni Gujral •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Book reviews • Poetry room • Apropos



About the art on the front and back cover

Paintings by Dakshina. Front cover: A new world is born. Back cover: Darshan. Both paintings were done in oil colors.

The authors and poets

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Amanda Emerson, self-described Spoiled Child of God, doer of odd jobs, poet-dreamer, now edits Rick Lipschutz's book.

Arthur Fielder (docafielder@yahoo.com) is a chiropractic doctor in Los Angeles. He had early connections with the Sri Aurobindo centers in Sedona, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. He was the first "boarder/student/renter" at the Mother's school in New Delhi in 1969, and his family was instrumental in bringing Sri Chinmoy to the U.S.

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Edmond Gore Alexander Holmes (1850–1936) was an Irish educationalist, writer and poet.

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Dhirendra Mehta was an accomplished Gujarati poet who resided at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

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

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

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From the office of Collaboration

The artist

Dakshina is the director of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP), an Ashram in Lodi, CA. She is also the President of Auromere, an importer and distributor of Ayurvedic personal care products, which is the Ashram-run business. Photos of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother provide the basis of many of Dakshina's paintings which grace the walls of the Ashram, but more recently flowers have also become a central theme in her art.

We begin this issue in Current affairs with a report on the Sourcing Our Oneness conference held in October at the Nainital ashram, a center run by the Sri Aurobindo Delhi Branch in the foothills of the Himalayas. The object of the conference was to facilitate the coming together and cooperation among the various splintered Sri Aurobindo communities. This report is followed by some news from the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles.

In AV almanac, we have a report by Carel Thieme on the land situation in Auroville, from the perspective of the Land Board. This latter qualification is necessary, because in Auroville there are often contentious perspectives on important issues such as land. However, this report provides many facts and seems balanced in reflecting some of the controversies.

In the Salon, we start with an essay by Rick Lipschutz which concerns the common avoidance of spiritual or other important topics in our everyday discourse, and a kind of mindless acceptance of all kinds of other nonsense. We follow this with an essay by Douglas McElheny about a personal dream experience and its interpretation, and a short piece by Arthur Fielder about Max Theon, an occultist with whom the Mother practiced, and whose teachings had significant correspondences with those of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

In Essays, we have three articles. The first, by Larry Seidlitz, discusses Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution and its implications for the emergence of human unity in our world. The second is by James Anderson and it focuses on the intricacies of the Integral Yoga, and in particular, on the opening up of the physical and bodily consciousness to the higher consciousness. The third is by Navni Gujral, and is an introspective analysis of the experience of gratitude, which includes interesting illustrations which she provided.

In Source material we have two interesting selections. The first, by Sri Aurobindo, concerns the implications of the fact that the Divine is guiding both our individual and the collective development. The second, by the Mother, is about the central importance of accepting the darkness within ourselves and consciously offering it to the Divine for its transformation.

In Book reviews, we have two reviews: one of Larry Seidlitz's new book, *Integral Yoga at Work*, reviewed by Martha Orton, and the second of Shraddhavan's new book, *The English of Savitri*, Vol. 2, reviewed by Larry Seidlitz.

In The poetry room, we have a selection of inspiring spiritual poetry, and in the Apropos section, a collection of thought-provoking spiritual quotations.

Invitation to submit a short essay for publication

With the intention to make *Collaboration* more interactive and participatory, we invite you to submit a short essay of about 300-800 words for the next issue on *any topic related to Integral Yoga* 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 April 1, 2017.

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

Editor: Larry Seidlitz, 42 Pappammal Koil St., Anandam Apts. Ground Fl., Apt. 1A, Kuruchikuppam, Puducherry 605012; email: lseidlitz@gmail.com. The opinions expressed in *Collaboration* are not necessarily those of the editor or the SAA.

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Subscriptions: Send requests to: 2715 W. Kettleman Lane, suite 203-174, Lodi CA 95242 USA, or call Auromere (209-339-3710 ext. 2) with your credit card information; A one-year subscription (three issues) is \$25 (\$35 for airmail outside the USA; a patron subscription is \$50 or more). For India residents, send requests along with Rs. 200 in the name of Larry Seidlitz to: Larry Seidlitz, 42 Pappammal Koil St., Anandam Apts. Ground Fl., Apt. 1A, Kuruchikuppam, Puducherry 605012.

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; Mateo Needham, vice president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Margaret Phanes, communications officer; Mira Patel, 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

Sourcing Our Oneness workshop at Nainital

by the Sourcing Our Oneness team

Above in a high breathless stratosphere,
Overshadowing the dwarfish trinity,
Lived, aspirants to a limitless Beyond...

Under the title Sourcing Our Oneness, a series of programs were conceived for those working for the realization and fulfilment of the aims and ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through various organizations such as Auroville, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Sri Aurobindo Society, The Golden Chain Fraternity, World Union, Sri Aurobindo's Action, Auroville International, SACAR, and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch. The aspiration is to facilitate the coming together of people from these various backgrounds and initiating the building of a constellation that works in resonance, from which can emerge a collaborative work and support, furthering the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother within our own organizations, in India and in the world.

The very first program in this series was hosted at the Unity Pavilion, Auroville on May 31, 2015. The second program was hosted by Sri Aurobindo Society at its Sharanam premises, near Lake Estate, on October 25, 2015. A third event was organized at the premises of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch at Nainital, from October 2 to 8, 2016. For this event, participation was invited from all over India and abroad, for a week-long program.

During this week, like the petals of a lotus, the different groups working for Mother and Sri Aurobindo came together in the scenic wonder: Van Nivas of Nainital. They were a group of approximately 85 participants, coming from India and abroad, representing most of the above mentioned organizations. The group had a wonderful balance with half the participants being between 20–40 and the other half in the age groups above, including very respected elders. This made for a wonderful fun and creative space which also held depth and silence.

The seven-day program was filled with interesting and delightful activities, many of them new and experimental to all of us. The purpose of this getting together was to experience working from oneness, to meet and know each other

in that space, and from these experiences see what will emerge, how this oneness can manifest in action.

The basic tools or instruments which we applied in the workshop were the 12 qualities/petals of the Mother's symbol (i.e. Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Goodness, Generosity, Equality, Peace); and Sri Aurobindo's five dreams given in his address to the nation on August 15, 1947 (briefly, the creation of a free and united India, the liberation and resurgence of Asia, a world union based on an international spirit and outlook, the spreading of the spiritual gift of India to the world, and a further step in human evolution to a higher consciousness).

Most days would commence by gathering ourselves outside in the open space in front of Sri Aurobindo's statue and chanting the Gayatri Mantra and chants selected for the theme of that day. These daily precious minutes of collective devotion revealed the marvel of voices gathering and communicating to the Beyond. All nature—birds, monkeys, trees—joined us in this offering. This would be followed by inspiring readings and interactive sessions with Tara-di and light-hearted fun sessions with Aurovilian Fif who works as a medical clown. Fif helped many of us to become free from our inhibitions, come closer to one another, and surrender to the oneness and light in and around us.

This would be followed by small group activities using the 12 qualities to act from our intuitive space. Each day had as a theme one of the Matrimandir gardens of Life, Power, Wealth, and Utility together with the qualities of Goodness, Generosity, Equality and Peace, enabling us to look deeply at environment, organization, wealth and karma yoga. In this exercise we also used inspiration and guidance from Mother's significances given to flowers. Thus our calculative and logical mind was given some rest, and we let ourselves flow with the higher energy. Our creative juices unleashed, we achieved impressive results in seeing how the various qualities could foster the development of Life, Power, Wealth and Utility.

The central activity for the workshop was a collective process to see how we could work towards the realization of Sri Aurobindo's five dreams. Five groups of 15–20 each worked on one of the dreams over the course of five days and then presented their results to the entire assembly. Looking through Impacts, Outcomes, Outputs and Inputs of activities that would work towards achieving these dreams, the groups laid practical steps to follow Sri Aurobindo's divine plan towards a true human unity based on a higher consciousness.



In the evenings were opportunities for presentations. One of the most inspiring evenings was when the various youth participants shared about their respective work and activities. These included various members of Youth groups in Auroville, the Sri Aurobindo Society, as well as other individuals. It was heartening to witness so much fresh energy being directed towards the unification and uplifting of the youth in India and the world.

Morning and afternoons also held other optional activities to energize the body and mind. These included Pranayama; Embodiyoga; Awareness through the Body Meditations; Clay Modelling; talks or discussions on topics such as Tantra, science and spirituality, and the work of various participants; River Crossing; Rappelling; and three mountain treks. The treks in the lap of Nature included breathtaking viewpoints of Tiffin Top, Sri Aurobindo Peak and Naina Peak, filling us with a sense of great appreciation for the beauty within and around us.

The evening meditations took on a new hue when wonderful singers from the facility—Gaurab and Siddhant—mesmerized us with soul stirring bhajans of Meerabai and Kabir, evoking a deep sense of devotion and gratitude.

Videos on Auroville, the Ashram, and the Life of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as presentations of The Sri Aurobindo Society and the Delhi Ashram, brought things into perspective. Understanding the work taken up by each of the main participant organizations through the presentations and discussions, helped to broaden our horizons and contribute to the collective Work accordingly.

After the week-long meeting, many of the participants shared taxis for a two hour winding drive to visit Madhuban in Ramgarh. Some stayed just for a few hours, others for a night, or longer. Madhuban is a beautiful retreat center on a mountainside overlooking a valley and the surrounding mountains. It is far from the tourist crowds and beautifully managed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Delhi Branch. From there some of the participants hiked to Tapogiri, which is a center run by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, and even further, to Mountain Paradise, another center managed by the Delhi Ashram. After the evening meditation at Madhuban, most of the youth participants gathered for a meeting to discuss possible collaboration in future projects in the villages surrounding Madhuban. Gradually, the participants departed for their respective journeys home.

The meticulous organization of activities by Jaya, Helena, Mita, Anju, Shivakumar, Kavitha, Uma Ramanan, Muna and others helped the many events flow smoothly. Sushil dedicated himself to videotaping the many sessions during the week. Thanks also to the staff for the wonderful meals and service

and their guidance on the outings and treks. The efforts of Narayanan and friends for arranging the transport to and from the camp was also deeply appreciated. We specially thank Tara-di for hosting the event, her encouragement, and getting everything together in a harmonious manner.

Over the days a wonderful resonance emerged and slowly we all danced in the rhythm of the higher music, as one big family, making beautiful friendships and carrying wonderful memories, committing to work together for the future realization.

Of creation's oneness sweet and fathomless,
Compelled to embrace my myriad unities
And all my endless forms and divine souls.
O Mind, grow full of the eternal peace;
O Word, cry out the immortal litany:
Built is the golden tower, the flame-child born.

—poetry from Savitri by Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles update

In January, Anie Nunnally, long-time President, moved to Pondicherry to further her sadhana with former Aurovilian Michael Spector. Anie graciously welcomed many guests, families and distinguished visitors, as well as organized weekly satsang, *Savitri* study, educational seminars and Darshan days. Her warm presence is missed by all. Since returning to Pondicherry, Anie is teaching music to some students in the Ashram school and Michael continues his practice of Ayurvedic Polarity healing. The Sri Aurobindo Center wishes to gratefully acknowledge Anie's many years of dedication and service.

In August, Lakshman and Hansa Sehgal celebrated their golden wedding anniversary at the Center. It was a lovely afternoon with meditation and a reception and catered luncheon. Hansa and Lakshman spoke to the gathering about their many years together, how they met and how their marriage was blessed by the Mother both at the very beginning and through ongoing correspondence by letter. We were touched to hear about how the Mother united them by putting a symbol ring on Hansa's finger and then gave her one for Lakshman before she left Pondicherry to join him in the USA. Especially notable, and uplifting and inspiring it was to hear about Mother's presence secretly protecting and guiding them in the journey of life. It was a powerful reminder to us of Her promise to all those turned to Her that She is always with us as a guiding presence.



AV almanac

Acquiring and protecting the land: The views of the Land Board

by Carel Thieme

Reprinted from AV Today, October 2016 issue

When the members of the Land Board took office in January 2014 they met with a dire scenario. Funds to purchase lands were in short supply, the sale of outlying lands was blocked, land encroachment was rampant, land grabs and falsifications of land documents by outsiders were discovered, and legal assistance was insufficiently available. The absence of coherent policies between the various Auroville working groups added to the problems. Now, after almost two years of steady work and with active support from the Governing Board, the Secretary, the Working Committee, and the Funds and Assets Management Committee, the Land Board says there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Land consolidation issues

The Land Board's foremost task is to consolidate the City area of 1,212 acres. Excluding the peramboke (government owned) lands, about 120 acres still need to be acquired. "But a good 100 acres may not be available for purchase," says the Land Board, "as they are disputed and/or undivided family lands." In India, every descendant has a share in the ancestral property, but this sometimes leads to intra-family conflicts and a barrage of court cases that can take decades to get resolved. Though many people would like to sell, they are prevented from doing so by their family situation. "We may as well forget about purchasing these 100 acres in the immediate future," states the Land Board.

The remaining 20 acres are owned by people who have no cash flow problems and hence have no reason to sell immediately. Such land owners prove to be a huge challenge for the Land Board, because they try to push up prices with threats to develop their lands into residential areas. Private residential development by outsiders within the City area would naturally be detrimental to the development of Auroville in accordance with its Master Plan.

In the Greenbelt, the area surrounding the City, Auroville needs to acquire around 1,800 acres. Here, many

lands are for sale as the third generation village land-owners have moved from farming to employment to entrepreneurship. Many consider selling to Auroville a clean process, contrary to selling to outsiders which has often resulted in villagers being cheated. Nowadays, many villagers approach the Land Board for help in resolving intra-family problems or problems with outsiders. They look upon Auroville as an organization that can assist with law and order and provide arbitration.

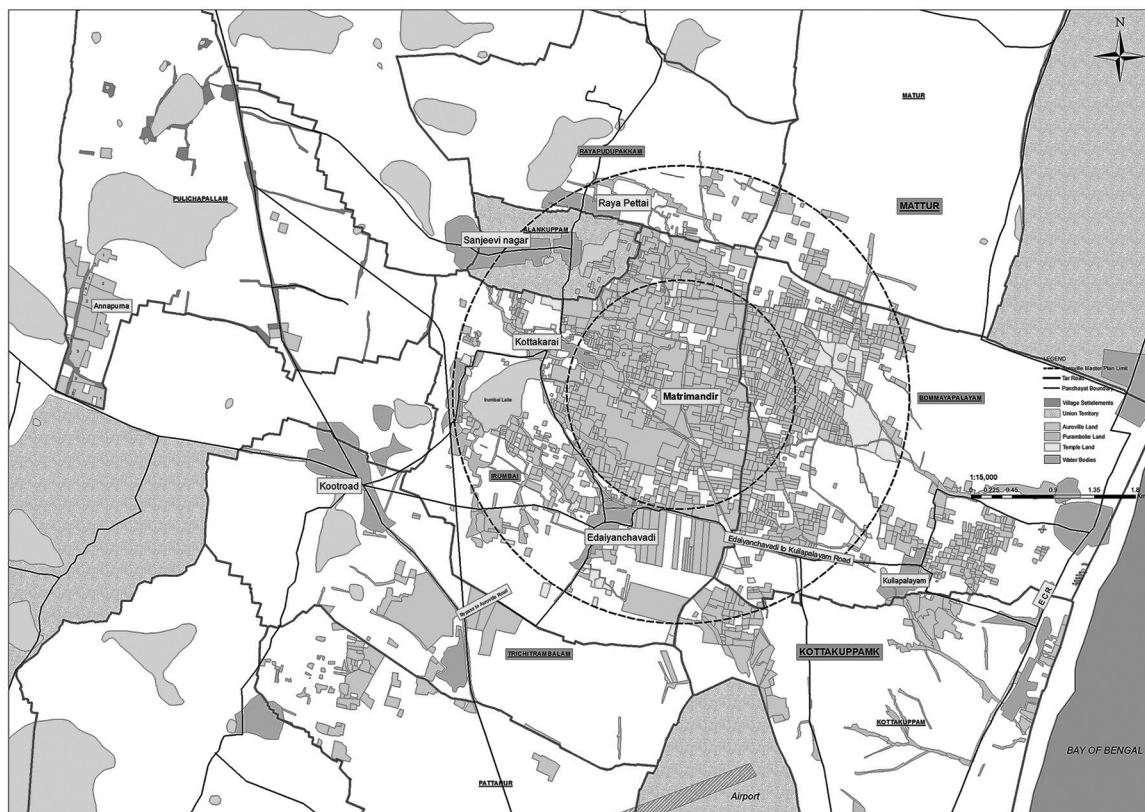
But how can Auroville respond to offers of purchase? For funds are in woefully short supply, notwithstanding the remarkable fundraising successes of the Acres for Auroville and the Green Acres campaigns. These successes have led to the purchase of some essential pieces of land; but looking at the overall requirement, they are but small steps on a long road.

The obvious solution would be to sell outlying lands and use the proceeds to buy lands inside the City and Greenbelt areas. Much of the outlying lands are to the west of the Pondicherry-Tinidivanam Highway and were bought in 1960's as the Auroville township was originally located along the highway. The Auroville community has approved 23 outlying areas to be sold or exchanged. But in accordance with the Auroville Foundation Rules 1997, land sales require the approval of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Auroville's nodal ministry, which has been requested many years ago. The request is still pending. This is detrimental to Auroville's development because the land prices within the Auroville township area are rising exponentially, yet the prices of these outlying lands are not increasing at the same rate.

Land exchange

In the meantime, the Land Board's solution is land exchange. Here it follows a priority approach, based on three criteria. The first is whether the land offered allows for the development of the city, the farms or forests. A second is whether the land offered supports the goal to protect valuable Auroville land that is located in the midst of non-Auroville land. The third criterion is whether the lands offered are of strategic importance and can serve as deterrent against unwanted development within and around the Auroville township area.

But not all land owners in the Auroville area want to exchange their land for Auroville's outlying plots. People from the nearby villages, as a rule, do not want to exchange their land for far-outlying lands unless those lands would have a commercial value, which is the case when the land



City area is in the central circle, the Greenbelt is in the outer ring. Areas in white are not yet Auroville lands.

borders a road. Auroville has a few outlying plots that have high commercial value, such as at Promesse, Auro Annam, Aurobrindavan, Service Farm, and Annapurna. Other distant plots, such as those near the Ousteri Lake, have no exchange value.

When the Ministry finally gives permission to sell outlying lands, much more can be done. The permission will moreover allow the Land Board to increase the cash flow by borrowing internally against future land sales. But the Land Board cautions that even after permission is granted by the Ministry, it will take at least a year to come up with an endorsed process that will ensure that Auroville land sales are compliant with government procedures for accountability.

What if the city lands cannot be acquired?

Consolidation of the lands in the city area is the community-endorsed priority, but the Land Board is not exclusively focused on this as they are convinced that all city lands will eventually become part of Auroville. The Board believes it may take time, but it will happen.

But wouldn't this block the manifestation of the city? The question was asked in the Land Board's interaction with members of Auroville International (AVI) who vis-

ited Auroville at the end of last year. "How many strategic plots not owned by Auroville prevent the development of the city?" asked the AVI members. They were stunned by the answer: none. The Land Board is convinced that Auroville can develop and build the city for the next 10 years before there would be any standstill caused by non-ownership of a plot of land. "The non-ownership of some lands is no issue at all. The problem would only occur," says the Land

Board, "if the Galaxy Master Plan would be imposed as an unchangeable yantra [a holy geometrical diagram, eds.]. If all stakeholders can be flexible, the Master Plan's three circular roads and twelve radials could all be put in place without purchasing a single acre. The circular roads would not be exact circles and the radials would not be strictly where they are planned today, but Auroville, without owning all the lands, could develop a township of 50,000 people within the city area, have four-storey buildings and still have more than 50% of the total area green." This, says the Land Board, is how Auroville should develop. "For if Auroville would not seek to rigidly impose the Galaxy plan as a yantra, all land speculators inside the city area would have the rug pulled out from under their feet."

Exchanging farm lands

The Land Board's land exchange proposals are decided by the Funds and Assets Management Committee, which of necessity has to take the views of the land stewards into account. But most land stewards, who have been looking after their plots for years and have made significant investments, object to the exchange. The Land Board often feels frustrated by this sense of 'private ownership' among



stewards instead of them agreeing to serve a larger purpose for the community.

For example, quite a few plots of top-quality farm land in the Greenbelt area are currently being offered for exchange. If Auroville had clear procedures, based on measurable criteria for evaluating farm land that is proposed for exchange (such as its soil quality and the extent to which its output is benefiting the community), and compare that to the potential of the land which is offered, the process would be clean and transparent. But this is not the case. “What usually happens,” says the Land Board, “is an emotional exchange of views between individuals and between working groups, and often the end result is not in the best interests of the community.”

The Board cites the Brihaspati land as a case in point. About half of it is located in the Greenbelt along its outer border. The other half is outside the Master Plan area, close to a highway. One part of the land is used as farm, one part for the activities of the Red Earth Riding School, and a third part is residential. The Land Board, considering the high value of the outside land, the poor quality of the soil, the lack of sufficient water, and its location close to the highway, proposed to exchange it for more fertile land within the Greenbelt area. This proposal, which would moreover consolidate a part of the Greenbelt, was objected to by the Aurovilian steward. The Farm Group, agreeing that Brihaspati farm is currently not operating at its full potential, considers that in the future it may prove to be invaluable for Auroville’s food security. Nevertheless, under certain conditions it may be open for negotiations on this issue. The lack of clear transparent processes to evaluate the differing claims of the Land Board and the Farm Group leads to mistrust and hostility, and Auroville as a whole loses out.

The current Land Board also has to deal with issues that it inherited from previous land groups, which are fraught with problems largely due to unacceptable processes of these groups. An example of such an issue is the exchange of Service Farm in 2010. In the absence of comprehensive policies for land allocation and stewardship, the Land Board feels that it is on the receiving end of general mistrust from individuals and working groups. The Land Board wants certain questions to be answered by the community. What are the criteria for land allocation? Who decides on land allocation? What are the roles and responsibilities of the land stewards? And on what grounds can an individual or a working group object to land exchange? For without answers, trust and unity within the community on the issues of land acquisition and exchange cannot be achieved.

Protecting the lands

Another important activity of the Land Board is land protection, a responsibility it shares with the Working Committee and the Auroville Security team in relation to matters on the ground. When matters go to court, the Auroville Foundation becomes involved. The Governing Board has accepted the Land Board’s recommendation to employ highly qualified lawyers experienced in land matters to protect the lands and to counter any impression that ‘Auroville lands are for all to use’ and speculator’s views that ‘Auroville is an easy and soft target’. Legal action is now undertaken by Auroville against land grabs, document forgery, and the shifting of fences. The Land Board says that high lawyers’ fees are nominal in respect to the value of the land that we may otherwise lose. Furthermore, these lawyers help establish Auroville’s reputation that it will now fight to protect its lands.

Protection and village issues are inter-connected as Auroville is the single largest land holder in the area with kilometres of boundaries with private and village lands. There are tremendous pressures of encroachment, creeping fence shifts, and sometimes the ganging-up of disgruntled villagers. A recent conflict with one of the neighboring villages started with its objection to Auroville undertaking fencing to stop further encroachment and reclaim about four acres of land that had been encroached over the years. Agitated villagers then blocked access to Auroville and threatened individual Aurovilians. The conflict was calmed down with the help of the Superintendent of Police, but the issue of how to improve Auroville’s relationship with the village is still on the table of the Working Committee.

If we don’t act to protect our own land interests, it is likely we will be exploited. But are there ways in which Auroville can protect and develop its land that also supports its relationship with the villagers and respects their needs? This is the larger challenge in our aim for embodying a living human unity.

Clarification: Above, reference was made to a statement from the Land Board to the Auroville International Centres that Auroville can develop and build the city for the next 10 years before there would be any standstill caused by non-ownership of a plot of land in the city area.

This statement has been misunderstood by some people in the sense that the Land Board would not be committed to acquiring the lands for in the city area. Consolidation of all lands in the city area at reasonable prices remains the prime objective of the Land Board and the continued support from all donors towards land purchase remains essential for the manifestation of “The Mother’s City.”



Salon

Hey, soul sisters!

by Rick Lipschutz

& edited by Amanda Emerson

*The following selection is taken from a book Rick is writing called *The Soul That Makes Us Matter**

Hey, Soul Sisters and Soul Brothers! Come out of those TV caves and bring our fire back to Life. We're done here, donating our soul-spark to those drunken dawn-drapers of dissipation, whose delight it is to dampen and douse it, cover it over and put it out, and put us out with it.

Now would be the time to put our Light to work, to work the fields with it, in a world that needs it more than ever. The burning light of our soul fairly begs for us to blend it with the blue flame on the Big Burner, the soul of the world where our rice has been cooked from the very beginning. Or that Stove is going to stop cooking our Rice, and the world will lose its soul, and the face of the Earth will be the face of hunger and the planet a ghost.

All I ever been told from Day One is Shh! I dare not share a grain of the real stuff from the world of my soul with this world that I love. Lines of legality and love where God entangles me.

Our "Mad Men," the ad men of Madison Avenue, know us better than we do. Don Draper, a character on a cable TV show who plays one of those ad men, acts more like them than they ever were. If the Don Drapers of the world know what makes us tick, and Don on the tube can prove it all night that he does, isn't it time for us to talk about it?

Can the Dawn That Drapes Us All, be dissipated by us discussing it?

Why don't I hear more real talk about the Real Thing? Isn't it the real secret of secrets not to keep it but to share it?

Just as when four hundred thousand stood on the Golden Gate Bridge to celebrate its 50th, and it buckled, slightly, and the harps began to vibrate—we can't talk about that, either.

Oh, I get it, if something matters to you, more than anything else does, absolutely do not talk about that: talk around it, talk through it, and then, go ahead and talk about everything else.

And let the Advertisers have it: they are the Master

Teachers, the Masters of the East, they have seen the mystic places, they know by sure identity our deepest secret motivations—even how to stir, into active life, the deep hidden breath of a human being. Or not.

Even more than the real thing, they know: what we are in those depths beyond the dust we are, and even deeper. Catchy little soft drink jingles tell us where our atman is. They've out-Willie'd Johnson blind: they know our souls ain't "nothing but a burning light." What's in the back of our mind, what we're hoping to find, they know it, they own it and they exist for one soul thrill, to sell it back to us, forever.

Long as we live in these carbonated forms, and we're all soul cousins, come on over, and let's all have a Coca-Cola!

What they don't want you to know is the hot new beverage, these days, is Water.

It's as real as the rain on our face, and we don't ever tell it like it is, like we can feel it and touch it. Not in church, we don't. Not in temple, mosque, shrine, or pantheon. Which, come to think of it, is just as well. Because the soul doesn't have a thing to do with religion. It's beyond thrones and thorns, in a hidden region of the heart, a place that can only be touched by the Supreme.

It's in a mystical place—an enigma, wrapped in an innuendo, inside an immortal jingle we all know, the pure transmission from the Masters of Madison Avenue.

The ones who are all mad, clean through, the Dawn in the East undrape, undrape until her face dissolves into the Daughter of Fire.

The soul, by tradition, has always seemed partial to the Madzub, the God-intoxicated being, the woolly Sufi mystic, or the Golden one, or has shown its face to so many wise women, and so few wise men, whom this world deems wise, deep, mad. The world pities the poor mystic and is swift to dismiss her. So then, when these wise guys, mystic women, the snow leopards that know, talk about the soul, they tell us, as a rule, never talk about it. They warn us, if we share the treasures of our soul then likely we will lose them.

The Sufis, the real Madmen of the East, have always said these things have wings and your soul will float away.

Let it! Let it! It is risky to talk about it but, today, the risk is greater if we don't. And if we're a little bit sincere, and not all braggadocio, our soul won't blow away for long, it will come back to us swiftly, or someday anyway, on the wings of the wind.

We got it backwards, the soul only went into hiding from the world because it's the world that shunned it, the world made the Soul go into hiding; it does not wander naked in ashes, as a recluse, by choice. Look, a thousand mendicants of joy a-wandering through the hills. The real



secret...no, not even...The Secret of Secrets has always wanted to be shared.

And there is plenty of rice, by Allah's timer, slowly cooking on the big burner as long as we serve that wildest of fires, not with wood and words alone, but with the finest substance of our own secret flame.

To help the Earth cool itself down, and us to keep living on its surface, the soul, more than it ever was, may have to be shared. If we're going to stay in Matter, in these bodies, sharing the good black Earth and squabbling over what's left of its topsoil, it may be in large part the sharing of the soul that makes us matter, enough to keep us here.

There's something to find, here on Earth, in this mental state, in these makeshift bodies that won't stop breaking down. For too long we've let identity politics police our identities.

My soul seems to be this singing light that is all that is left, once all the rest of me and all the rest of you go far, far away.

I'm telling you these things, that no one ever told me when I needed to hear, in the hope I can save you trouble. I sure wish this book had been there when I needed it. If you have breathing in you an aspiration, start feeding it everything you feel, every thought you think, and keep piling more fuel onto the flame. The aspiration your friends and teachers and loved ones have counseled you to reject, is the only real friend you have, closer than any human being can be. Mine is all I've got to help me through the passageway in a time of intolerable loss. Since my wife Lucie's death last summer, my aspiration alone has been there. It's the only friend I've got, and my true family are those who share it. And the angel of my soul has more forbearance than my truest family and most forgiving friend.

I'm tired of listening to empty noises from empty brains around me—especially mine, especially my own. This world's being shaken like a baby and that's starting to rattle its brain. How great our art, and greater still our science! Our Emperor has no clothes on, because it's getting so hot he doesn't need them anymore. We humans are so magic we are cooking the world with this human mind. Only a power that's beyond us will ever break our spell.

Is there time, for the mysterious forces that produced our kind, to start another?

It's time the Earth started jumping with creatures whose souls come totally alive. We go on pumping her, the fairest of planets, full of our poisons, go on burning up all her oil before we've even understood what it may be doing for the deep places where it still pools under the ground, but there's one thing we can't pollute, and that's light. If the tiniest part of us starts to turn toward the place where the sun is puls-

ing, this sends a torch flare with sparklers up through the darkness, a rising signal that our Soul is competent to see. Our soul is always watching. The soul is Grace in person, Light in its own most animate form. It can see in the dark, in color. It's been watching for a long, long time, scrutinizing these haunts, waiting for the smallest sign from us. And when it sees it, it will come and find us.

Then there is peace. You feel it, so powerful you can't seem to feel anything else. And a sweetness comes with strong arms to enfold you. You don't need an excuse to feel a joy that will freeze hell over. Love emboldens your face and it is stronger than the puny will of the paltry, the partial, and the proud. You suddenly find the courage to stand up to the things that used to push you around. Your soul may polish up your talents, bring you better thoughts and a bigger bathtub, but can also uncover surprise qualities that you never suspected you had. You didn't. Your light-fingered soul lifted them for you from the void.

Someday you will see your soul, and the beauty of it will bring tears to your eyes, the sweetest tears of this life, and you will be the sort of person who will bring fewer tears to others.

You will grow more important concerns once you've grown less concerned with your own importance.

There's a soul in you, infinitesimal yet infinite. Promise me not to die before you meet it. Find it while you live, find your soul while you're still breathing. It can only be found, the way it wants to, while you remain here in your body. For God's sake, don't count on ghosts to do it for you later.

I woke up this morning hearing the words, *I tried to tell you, but you didn't want to know*. These may be the best lines from "Tell Me," first lyric Mick Jagger ever wrote. The Rolling Stones would never have made it if they'd stuck to Muddy Waters covers.

They made it.

Keith doesn't look like he believes it's his soul that makes him matter—but then Keith's been known to spend a whole day learning one soul song. And Keith's rendition of "Somewhere over the Rainbow" has never been equaled. But when Hawaiian musician Israel Kamakawiwo'ole (ke-mecca-viva-olé) sang it, the soul sounded exactly like itself. Mick doesn't seem to want to talk about these things, either. Maybe keeping them secret is better.

Can't get no satisfaction without you keep an open mind.

Maybe things really do go better when you keep the real thing to yourself, or maybe things really do go better with Coke.



Breaking down a dream feeling

by Douglas McElheny

Even though I've been reading about and trying to dedicate my life to what you might call the advent of a divine life (or heaven on earth if you prefer) for years, it's not yet something my vital can get greatly excited about. I don't think I'm unique in this, but rather the rule and not the exception. This inability I feel comes from the limitations of the little mind and vital that I and most everyone else live in. I think it's possible for that little mind and vital to get more excited and comprehending about the prospect of a divine life than mine do. In fact, the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo aims at ultimately converting and transforming these parts (as well as the body) into willing and able instruments of the divine life.

There's another part of us though referred to in the Integral Yoga as the psychic being or in more common language the soul. It's a part of us which is "already given to the Divine"¹ and just naturally possesses an ardent fire and aspiration for the divine life which can also spread to the other parts of the being. Now both the words soul and psychic get a lot of usage and can mean a lot of different things to different people. So before I go on, let me allow the Mother to explain in more detail what she's pointing to with the terms 'psychic being' or 'soul':

It is the seat of the Divine Consciousness, the Divine Self in the individual being. It is a centre of light and truth and knowledge and beauty and harmony which the Divine Self in each of you creates by his presence, little by little; it is influenced, formed and moved by the Divine Consciousness of which it is a part and parcel. It is in each of you the deep inner being which you have to find in order that you may come in contact with the Divine in you. It is the intermediary between the Divine Consciousness and your external consciousness; it is the builder of the inner life, it is that which manifests in the outer nature the order and rule of the Divine Will. If you become aware in your outer consciousness of the psychic being within you and unite with it, you can find the pure Eternal Consciousness and live in it; instead of being moved by the Ignorance as the human being constantly is, you grow aware of the presence of an eternal light and knowledge within you, and to it you surrender and are integrally consecrated to it and moved by it in all things.²

Though I am not united with my psychic being nor even yet had a really definitive experience of it, I had a smaller experience recently that I believe was the result of an influence or contact with the psychic being and which was connected with a dream. So having set the scene, I'll now get into what happened.

A few weeks ago I was getting out of bed in the morning and suddenly remembered something that seemed to come from a dream. The memory though was a feeling; there was no picture or image content to it. I wish I had recorded what that feeling felt like on my voice recorder at the time, because now I can't really conjure it up, whereas it was quite concrete at the time. I do recall though that the feeling somehow grasped what you could call infinity or eternity for lack of a better word. It didn't bowl me over though. I felt it faintly but distinctly on the left side of my chest for a few seconds and then it sunk back down out of my awareness. I knew it was something significant, figured it came from some kind of experience during the night, but didn't give it much more thought than that. The whole thing kind of caught me off guard.

So I went about my day and in the afternoon I picked up one of the books I was reading, a book of short stories called *Guardians of Oneness* by a German disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who went by the name of Medhananda. The story I was currently reading was called 'One Million A.D.' It's the story of an astronaut who returns to earth after a long tour of the galaxy. However, since the astronaut spent most of his time away "traveling on a G-beam in a galactic slipstream"³ only 10 years have passed for him, whereas a million have passed on the earth. A lot has changed. The earth, he discovers, has again become a forest clad Eden populated by self-conscious animals and one remaining man. This man, who introduces himself as homo ultimus, is evolved far beyond what we would call human and has remained behind to foster and oversee the evolution of the animals. The rest of humanity has gone to live and continue their evolution in the suns, where, as homo ultimus explains, they take part in "those higher intensities of life and love which are possible in a sun."⁴ After that initial meeting most of the story is dedicated to showing the life of peace, harmony and joy of creation and discovery that the animals enjoy. Toward the end of the story though, homo ultimus gives the astronaut and us a glimpse of the life man is now living in the suns, through a link between their minds. This is what the astronaut experiences:

All I could see was the stars. But as I looked through his eyes and vibration receptors they were not merely



stars any more, they were my fellow beings: friends, comrades, brothers—each one speaking to me, singing his particular and eternal hydrogen song which vibrated directly by molecular resonance in my DNA chains. Each had its own message, each was a guardian of a whole solar system, each was telling me about his adventure in evolution on the planets with which he was surrounded. Each one was singing his paean of cosmic love, of encouragement, of bliss, of victory, of triumph over the difficulties and obstacles of life and evolution. For hours I lay there listening, learning by memory-absorption all this news of the universe, of solar adventures and experiences.⁵

This was I believe the third time I've read this story, and like the other two times, I was struck and somewhat awed by what this passage implies. This time though it went a little further in me, somehow made me really see the reality of this greater life and helped trigger a little inner opening. Later on as I sat on the front porch and was thinking about what I'd read a strong excitement and yearning for that greater life arose as well as a sort of knowing that this divine life of splendors we can't even hardly conceive was really waiting for us. This knowing though wasn't an intellectual thing, but rather a feeling, a confidence. My mind in fact had gotten fairly quiet as this state came to the foreground. In addition, there was joy in the experience as well as calm and a feeling of purity. A further boon was that the chronic pain I constantly experience was significantly diminished.

The yearning and excitement waned after I got up from the porch rocker and had to start actively doing things, but the joy and calm hung around and diminished over the course of a few hours. There was still a touch of it when I went to bed, but upon awakening the next day it was gone. It was just a little glimpse that came and went, and I feel it was a promise of something that could become permanent. One of the reasons I think this was a psychic contact is because the experience was mainly on the level of the heart which is where the psychic being has its nexus with the outer nature. Other things about the experience that for me are indicative of the psychic are the element of aspiration as well as the element of feeling/knowing. As the Mother points out, the psychic being:

has the true knowledge, an intuitive instinctive knowledge. It says, "I know; I cannot give reasons, but I know." For its knowledge is not mental, based on experience or proved true. It does not believe after

proofs are given: faith is the movement of the soul whose knowledge is spontaneous and direct. Even if the whole world denies and brings forward a thousand proofs to the contrary, still it knows by an inner knowledge, a direct perception that can stand against everything, a perception by identity. The knowledge of the psychic is something which is concrete and tangible, a solid mass. You can also bring it into your mental, your vital and your physical; and then you have an integral faith—a faith which can really move mountains.⁶

Now I think I should point out that this wasn't some exalted state. It all happened within the confines of normal human consciousness and was basically a temporary uplift. Regardless I think any sane person would find it much more preferable to exist in that state if they once had a taste of it. The requirement for that though it seems would be to unite with one's psychic being, otherwise experiences like this will remain transient.

It also bears mentioning that this memory from the dream and the experience in the waking state were not identical. The essence of the dream memory was something more profound, but more subtle. Regardless, for me the link between the two is clear, and what I think happened was that there was an inner experience during sleep that spilled over a bit into my waking life first as the dream memory and then later as the waking experience. And even though reading Medhananda's story helped trigger the state, the mostly unrecalled sleep experience was the primary thing in my opinion. I'm also of the opinion that things like this happen with some frequency during our sleep hours, but most of the time we're unable to bring back any memory of them. In one of her talks on dreams the Mother explained why this is:

Some people do not have a passage between one state and another, there is a little gap and so they leap from one to the other; there is no highway passing through all the states of being with no break of the consciousness. A small dark hole, and you do not remember. It is like a precipice across which one has to extend the consciousness. To build a bridge takes a very long time; it takes much longer than building a physical bridge.... Very few people want to and know how to do it. They may have had magnificent activities, they do not remember them or sometimes only the last, the nearest, the most physical activity, with an uncoordinated movement—dreams having no sense.⁷



So the lesson here is that with the right development a conscious bridge can be built between all the regions we visit in sleep and our waking state. Then we can more easily recall these things upon awakening. I'm sure there are occult disciplines that have been laid out for building that bridge, but I haven't come across them with the exception of Tibetan dream yoga. And while I've done a lot over the years to improve my dream recall and also my ability to lucid dream, the main thing I rely on now in dream work (other than keeping a journal of dreams I feel are important) is just trying to do the sadhana and asking the Mother to help me reach my psychic being as well as the higher levels of consciousness above the normal human mind while I'm in the dream state. In addition, I've asked her to take charge of my lucid dreams and to help me remember to call on her when I find myself lucid. When I do remember to call on her, usually a force takes me and I travel in blackness for a while. A few times I've reached another dream, but normally I find I either can't hold the concentration and fully wake up or am back in my body in the cataleptic state.

I had some dreams though that came about three weeks before the experiences I relate in this article which I feel offer some encouragement that the process of building that bridge is moving forward. The reader should know that both of these dreams happened in the same night. I should also mention to the reader that Sam, who appears in the first dream, was a professor of mine and later a friend. More importantly though he was the first person I ever met who talked openly about how he was on a spiritual path.

In the first dream I'm in a car with Sam going down a country road and he's driving. As we drive I'm reading a little book someone gave me that was written by Sam. I'm telling Sam the story of how I got the book, which had something to do with how I kept trying to bring someone's business cards into the chamber of commerce where I work, and they kept blowing out of my hand. I'm reading something in the book, and the gist of it was that you keep up your practices until the zero hour, or maybe it said the third hour. It's implying that grace eventually intervenes. It says something too about how the grace came for Sri Aurobindo. When I look back at that part of the text again, it's changed now to say Sir Richmond and not Sri Aurobindo. I know that Sir Richmond is a name Sam uses to refer to himself in the book. Then Sam pulls over and stops the car because he thinks it's acting up. I tell him we better turn around and head back. Instead though he pulls up a little side road, and we pass through a bit of forest until we get to a wooden bridge that is too narrow for the car. The bridge has some plants on it which are draping it with beautiful

flowers. One was like a bougainvillea with purple or pinkish purple flowers. I believe there were light blue flowers too. On the other side of the bridge is a beautiful big stone house landscaped also with the purple flowers and also blue ones too if I remember correctly. The stones are cut and are about the size of cinder blocks. They fit together perfectly and are a dark grey. It's almost like a fortress or castle in style, but it doesn't have a sense of foreboding about it. On the contrary, it looks very cool and inviting the way a shady spot next to a cool stream would be. We're both admiring the beauty, and I tell Sam that the house must be 5,000 square feet at least.

In the second dream, as the observer, I'm looking at a bridge that is being built from both sides to meet in the middle. The bridge is about 50 feet long and is an arch or at least slopes up toward the middle. It's almost done and there is just a few feet more until the two sides connect. I'm semi lucid and remembering the bridge from the earlier dream with Sam as well as another bridge from another dream from that night, and I'm remembering them both as almost ready to meet in the middle too. I'm thinking this must have something to do with making the connection to the psychic being, and I'm repeating "Mother I must have this."

Now in one dream the bridge was too narrow, and in the other it wasn't complete, but I think it's just two ways of saying the same thing. Namely that there's some work to go to complete the bridge to whatever is represented by the beautiful stone house with all the flowers. My guess is that the house symbolizes the sanctuary of the psychic being, and the presence of flowers would seem to support that since flowers can represent things psychic. Another thing in favor of this idea is the intuition I had in the second dream that the bridge represented making the connection to the psychic being. I think I will trust that intuition for now until I feel I have good reason not to or I discover in time that the bridge represented something else. I should point out though that while in the Integral Yoga, pink is a psychic color, blue is more of a spiritual color and purple a color corresponding to the vital. So maybe there's more represented here than just the psychic change [or transformation].

Another interesting point about the bridge in the second dream that was raised by my collaborator Donny, is the fact that it's being built from both ends to meet in the middle. He suggested that could mean that the one end represents my own personal effort and aspiration in the sadhana while the other end represents the answering grace, and that both are needed to make that connection. I don't know if that's true, but it makes enough intuitive sense that I thought it worth putting forward for consideration.



In conclusion, I think that regardless of what the house in the first dream symbolizes, it's clear the bridge to something good is nearing completion. How near to completion is hard to say. There were feet left to go and not inches, so it may not be something imminent. Being shown though that the bridge is being built has given a boost to my faith, and perhaps that was the primary purpose of these dreams. The first dream also gives some good advice, which I'll try to take, which is to carry on with the sadhana keeping frustration at bay and with the faith that when the zero hour is reached the grace will take care of the rest.

More of Douglas' writings on dreams and their use in the Integral Yoga can be found at www.harms-end.com.

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Max Theon's influence on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

by Arthur Fielder

While the names and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are well known to those involved in Integral Yoga, they may not be aware of the important influence on their philosophies by Max Theon.

Born with the name, Lewis Maximilian Bimstein, Theon was a Polish, Russian Jew, occultist and Jewish Kabbalist. His father was a rabbi, and we can assume it to be true that he grew up with a spiritual backbone.

Max Theon traveled in high circles of educated people in France and England, where he was the center of attraction to the intelligentsia of the time.

On or about 1885, he crossed paths with Irish born Mary Christine Woodruff, also known as Madame Alma Theon, who became his wife. It was Alma who was the skillful occultist providing the compelling force to perform

mystic arts. The subject of Alma's mystic arts is material for a separate article of study. Though Max was well accomplished in conveying and communicating ideas through multiple languages across cultural channels, it was Alma that had the deep mystic arts capabilities such as séance and planchette, and so on.

While in Algeria, Max and Alma acquired an estate where they enjoyed a widespread and well received reputation in the mystical arts. It was here in Tlemcen, Algeria, where the Mother, after hearing from her brother, Mateo, of the two occultists renown, traveled to meet and study with them.

Alma's untimely, accidental death on the coastline of France sent Theon into a deep depression. For about six months he was nursed back to health and returned to Algeria, where he may have never fully recovered.

Max traveled and taught in a couple of European countries, including England. While in London, he is credited with having inspired the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and other groups such as the *Cosmic Review*. The Mother's notes also relate that Max traveled to India at a young age.

The reader may note that we are dealing with early manifestations of Theosophical thinking.

The Cosmic movement was in many ways very prescient in attempting to counteract the destruction of traditional values brought about by industrialization. The industrial age was, of course, ever present as a change agent of heretofore unseen magnitude.

An item of significant importance is that Max Theon, with his knowledge of Kabbalah, created the Sri Aurobindo symbol as we know it today, only slightly modified in dimension by the Mother, herself.

The Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and teaching overlap ideas by Theon, Helena Blavatsky, Pascal Themanlys, Charles Bartlet, and other mystical philosophers of that period. According to the Mother, Theon met with Blavatsky, who with several others started the Theosophical Society in 1875. The concepts of the seven planes of existence, the central importance of evolution, and a reincarnating soul or higher Self which is distinct from the psycho-physical personality, were common to both Théon and Theosophy. The integration of science, philosophy, and mysticism are also common to these teachings. Annie Besant, who knew Sri Aurobindo, succeeded Blavatsky as President of the Theosophical Society in 1907. Themanlys and Bartlet studied Jewish mysticism under Theon, and wrote on these mystical teachings. Most significantly, the Mother practiced occultism under the tutelage of Max and Alma Theon in Algiers.



Essays

Evolution and the emergence of human unity

by Larry Seidlitz

Sri Aurobindo's teachings explain in great detail and with great convincingness, ourselves, the nature of the world and its difficulties, why they exist and their purpose, and where things are going. Sri Aurobindo was a brilliant scholar of the classics, so he was steeped in the philosophy, the literature, and the trends of Western civilization from its very beginnings. At the same time, he was an Indian sage and mystic of the highest type, who has prolifically written out his inner experiences and yogic knowledge, as well as the trends that are going on in the world, in both vivid prose and poetry. It is an incredible record of spirituality, of ideas and experiences that are very subtle and out of the ordinary, in very precise language.

One of the main ideas in Sri Aurobindo's teaching is that there is an evolution of consciousness taking place here on Earth. Consciousness has emerged out of the dense unconsciousness of matter. It has struggled to emerge in little jets, in little individualities, and the course of evolution is in its deepest sense the emergence of this consciousness. There is but one consciousness, the divine consciousness, which has put itself as a seed into matter, and is sprouting here and there out of matter and slowly developing in the process of evolution. This idea has immense implications for the development of human individuals and human societies, and the struggles



that we are going through. This development, with all its terrible growing pangs, is leading towards a full emergence of this divine consciousness in a future supramental race of beings here on Earth.

Humanity is centered in the individual ego, our whole sense of ourselves is grounded in our separate individualities, and this is something that doesn't disappear easily. One can get some kind of intellectual understanding that we are ultimately interconnected parts of the same, single existence, but that doesn't necessarily change our behavior or our entire attitude. As more and more people take to spiritual life, whether it's Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga or other spiritual paths, people will begin to wake up to the experience of the unity that underlies all things, and instead of grasping at life for oneself, will take into consideration other people and the world at large.

When Sri Aurobindo was writing his ideals about human unity the world was engulfed in war. It was during the First World War which tore apart Europe. And then came the Second World War, which engulfed the whole world, and in which many millions of people were slaughtered. Out of these conflicts emerged the beginnings of the UN, and a forum for dialogue between nations, a recognition that dealing with our international

disagreements and conflicts through war was not going to work. Although the UN is still not sufficiently strong to really prevent many of the conflicts, it is working as a positive force to bring the different sides of international conflicts to the table to discuss the problems, and try to find compromises and reach some kind of resolution. It is not fully successful, but at least the conflicts that are occurring in the world today are not on the scale that they were just a hundred years ago.

We see great developments recently in communication and awareness between peoples. There is a unification occurring in the mind of humanity that we didn't see a hundred years back. There is an emerging world culture that is integrating various world views, ways of life, and creating some kind of—it's too early to say 'unity'—but some kind of amalgam. All of this is still stirring and churning. Another important development is a growing sense of spirituality, or where that is still lacking, a growing sense of psychological mindedness, where we begin to look at conflicts between people in a deeper way. We're beginning to see, "Okay, here is someone different, we need to come into some kind of harmony with them, and we have to work out these differences." That kind of mentality is more and more emerging. We can see that conflict with others who are different from ourselves and that egoistic grasping for profit are not the highest summits of humanity, that we have better, more noble aims and parts of our being which we must try to realize in our lives. We need to focus on our ideals and look up to our highest possibilities, and not simply to our basic desires and interests.

Higher ideals of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism have come from the East primarily, and they have oriented the consciousness



of much of humanity towards some image or reflection of the Divine, towards a greater consciousness, and towards more humane ideals of living. They haven't cured our persistent ills, and they have often been distorted and diverted into enormously destructive conflicts between peoples, but one can argue that they have had a generally uplifting effect. The West, on the other hand, has primarily been important with its stress on the physical world, and the development of the infrastructure and organization of society, and these advances have been incorporated now, more and more, into the Eastern countries.

We have become much more interconnected with both positive and negative consequences. The economic drive which is so powerful in the West, with its interrelated motives of profit and financial wealth, which unfortunately have become one of the main goals in life for many people, is now being imported by the Eastern countries. On the positive side, it is helping to raise up many of the poorer nations of the world economically, to give people a better life, to cure some of the diseases that have ravaged those countries. But to the extent that the East is throwing out spiritual values for economic gain is a negative development.

Sri Aurobindo said that it's possible to take a philosophical stand on either matter or on spirit, but that the realms of life and mind in between do not offer a solid philosophical foundation. Matter is such a strong, sensible reality that it is easy for us to accept it as the fundamental reality. We feel it most directly. This viewpoint has its focus on the material life, on its development, refinement, and improvement. We sense material life more directly than the spirit, which can seem ethereal, maybe even something imaginary and which is ultimately not

true. So it is perhaps inevitable that a major portion of humanity would have taken its stand on matter as the fundamental reality, as our origin and the sum and substance of our existence. We can also sense an ultimate reality in spirit. At least this is what has been done widely in India and in some of the other Eastern countries. True spiritual experience feels ultimately real: it gives a sense of infinity, a sense of infinite consciousness that feels permanent and fundamental. Compared to that experience the world itself seems unreal. It brings with it an inner peace and delight, which is in sharp contrast to the normal experience of the world in which suffering and struggle are prevalent. So we can take a stand on either end. Eastern societies have, for the most part, focussed more heavily on the spiritual reality, Western civilizations on matter.

Yet no matter how convincing our material science has become we still have vast numbers of people in the West turning to spiritual experience and to spiritual ideals because material life itself cannot completely satisfy, and also because there's some intimation and perhaps some concrete experience in many people that there is something else, there is something beyond the material life.

We struggle to survive and thrive in this world in the face of countless competing people and the formidable forces of nature. Life is a struggle and it always has been from its very beginning. Humanity carries the long history of its evolution in its consciousness—this emergence through struggle, pain, suffering, death—and we can't easily go beyond that, because it is part of our heritage. This struggle comes because of a limitation of the consciousness. It comes because there is the lack of perception of unity. We feel separate, and until that sense of

separation can be eradicated, conflict and suffering will continue. We can try to destroy our enemies, we can try to fight against the forces of nature, but ultimately we cannot be successful. We fight and we struggle and we suffer, but ultimately it doesn't work, and we are forced into some kind of true solution which involves a harmonization with our fellow beings and with nature. We need to finally find our unity with others, find the underlying unity of all of existence. Thus all that struggle and pain forces us in a way to move upwards in the scale of evolution, to go beyond our sense of limitation, and to find our spiritual unity.

Suffering arises as a natural result of limitation and ignorance, of being fixed in the very narrow mould of our egoistic life. We have to break out of that in order to cure our suffering. We have to break out of the confines of our mental structures and life habits. We have to open up to something larger. Our suffering and difficulties lead us to progress, but ultimately we need to take a higher step in the evolution. We need to enter into a spiritual consciousness beyond the mind, which is firmly based in the unity that underlies us and enables us to deal with our fellow beings and the world from that standpoint, with a comprehension of the world and its forces and complexities, and which has the power to solve the difficulties that we face in our lives in the world.

There are many examples of saints and sages from both East and West who have found this spiritual consciousness beyond the human mind and have borne witness to the spiritual oneness underlying humanity, and to powers and knowledge beyond the ken of intellectual understanding. Their writings from all times and all regions of the world are testimony to the truth of the spirit. These spiritual



experiences are available to everyone. All of us bear within us this spiritual reality; it is only covered over by our preoccupation with the surface movements of our minds and lives. To find it we need to go more deeply within. We can find and experience for ourselves this spiritual reality, and a whole variety of spiritual paths have been given to us to show us a way, a discipline by which we can do this.

Sri Aurobindo says that we are not only this outer being that we normally experience as our mind, life, and body, but that deeper within we are a spiritual being who has come here upon earth in order to participate in this evolution of consciousness. This spiritual being works through our soul, a portion of the divine being that has descended into this evolution and stands behind our conscious outer life. It throws out intimations to our surface self, but as from behind a veil, so we're not really conscious of their source. These intimations include our strivings towards a greater, more noble life, towards harmony and beauty and sweetness, towards a deeper understanding of ourselves and others, towards self-mastery and mastery of life in the world. But in order to experience our soul in its fullness we need to develop, participate in, some kind of spiritual discipline, because ordinarily the soul's influence does not come out fully in the natural course of life. Normally we receive only indirect influences from it, as much as it can impress itself into our mind and life. But because our outer minds and lives are, for the most part, occupied with outer things, they don't consciously listen to these promptings from within, and can easily override them, can easily turn away from them. So we need to make a conscious and concerted effort in order to go within and listen to these promptings and bring them out fully.

These are experiences that we all can have, that we all can know. I think most of us have some sense, some experience of the soul behind. Many of us have had clear promptings from our soul, have had glimpses that there was some greater reality, some greater delight of existence which is there, some sense of freedom, some inner intuition or deeper understanding, some glimmer that we are something more than our surface life. And these influences, these promptings may be brief-lived, they may last just for a few moments, or they may occur in a dream. Or perhaps certain circumstances have arranged themselves in our lives in such a way that we understand this could not have just happened by coincidence or by chance, that something must be guiding the things that have occurred in our life in some way, and that these events seem to be moving towards something which we don't yet understand. We may have a sense that something or someone is leading, guiding us, even though we may not be aware of who or what it is or where it is leading. Many of us have had brief experiences like this, but when we turn towards our soul in a conscious, deliberate manner, concentrate on it and try to bring it out fully into our life, then these things begin to happen more frequently and we begin to have a clearer understanding of our deeper spiritual existence.

Spirit is something beyond mind, and mind cannot really experience or comprehend it. It tries to understand it, and it can get some kind of mental reflection of it, but it cannot really enter into that spiritual reality. So actually the mind has to subordinate itself. It has to quiet itself and leave room for the higher spiritual experiences to unfold, to disclose themselves in our consciousness. Our consciousness is not only our mind, it has higher

realms than our intellectual understanding and reasoning, and our mind needs to make room for them. Often it will not even be through the mind, but through the heart, through a feeling of unity with others or with nature, or an inner communion with the Divine. There are actually two centers through which spiritual experiences can reveal themselves: one in the heart, and one above the mind, just above the head.

However, the mind can be a good starting point. The mind can begin to understand its own limitations, it can begin to understand that there is a greater existence, a greater reality here at work. Sri Aurobindo has written extensively about the spirit and spiritual experiences which are beyond mind, and by giving us an intellectual form for these experiences, our minds can begin to grasp and understand them. This is a view of reality that makes sense even intellectually, so from this intellectual standpoint we can understand the directions in which we can go in order to get direct experiences of the spirit. He gives us a very detailed, complex understanding of existence, of ourselves, of the larger spiritual reality, and this understanding can be a great help towards spiritual experience, though in itself it does not give that experience. It can only lead us towards it.

Previous paths of spirituality in India and elsewhere have had a tendency to emphasize that the spiritual reality is above this world of limitation and suffering that we have here. Followers of those paths have had a direct experience of a greater reality beyond this world, and could enter into that existence and leave this world behind. But Sri Aurobindo says that this leaves too much unexplained. For one thing, what then is the purpose of this existence, why should the Divine create this world if it is only to leave it behind? He



says no, the reality of the Spirit is everywhere, not only above, but also here in this world. This world is also real, it is not an illusion as is claimed by many spiritual teachers. However, the spiritual reality of the world is still hidden within it, within our consciousness, so it needs to emerge more fully through the course of evolution and through our own conscious strivings towards it, and then in that emergence it will also spiritualize and transform life.

In the beginning of evolution there was first just inert matter, a universe of stars and worlds spinning in space, just a material scene with no sense of life anywhere. Somehow in that material universe life began and emerged, and similarly there later developed and emerged a mind that could reflect upon life and upon the world, which we see evident in humanity. With the emergence of mind in humanity, there was not a withdrawal and escape of life out of the world into some mental idea. Rather, an embodied mind began to work upon life, to transform it, and to change the material conditions of the world, to harmonize itself with them. Similarly, with the emergence of the spiritual consciousness in the future course of evolution we will not simply escape out of the world into a pure spiritual existence, but there will be an embodied spiritual consciousness here in the world, turning upon life and mind, upon our material existence and our collective human existence, transforming them, uplifting them and harmonizing them with its own greater existence.

This is a great aim for us both individually and for the world as a whole. We can thus see a purpose in all of this, we can see that this could actually become a world of great beauty, freedom, and delight. Of course, we can see beauty, freedom, and delight in the world already, but they are still

intermixed with ugliness, limitation, pain, and suffering. But we can envision the possibility of a full emergence of a unified consciousness enabling a solution to our human discord and a true harmonization of life on earth.

Despite the emergence of mind in humanity, the raw forces of animal life with their instincts for survival, reproduction, dominance, expansion of territory and influence are still powerful and hold sway within us individually and in the world at large. They can and must be tempered with our reason and developing sense of order, harmony, and beauty, but this is still a work in progress in our human evolution.

Because of the explosion of science and technology and Western thought on the physical world, there has been a growing mastery of physical forces that enables the mind to turn upon matter and utilize it for its own purposes. This is all fine and good and a part of the evolution. Mind has to evolve and it hasn't reached its full potential yet. Mind is a great power, but it will not bring the solutions to our existence because it's still based on division. It cannot comprehend the spiritual reality, which exists above the mind.

Still, there are great possibilities within mind, and if we can utilize it for higher purposes it can become part of a fuller emergence of consciousness in our world. For example, the mind has created technologies which enable us to communicate in a more immediate and wider way. This is drawing people together from all over the world to learn about, discuss, and work on specific problems and issues of interest to them in ways that would not have been possible before. Many other advances in human development are being made through technologies in such fields as medicine, education, transportation, manufacturing, food production, energy production, and

construction, to name a few. However, often the very same technologies can also be used for selfish and destructive purposes, which they obviously have been, and result in devastating consequences. If we would begin to guide our use of technologies by spiritual ideals towards the higher evolution of ourselves individually and of humanity generally, our progress could become more smooth and rapid.

Such an elevating use of technology is evident for example in the burgeoning of websites, blogs, online discussion groups, and online study courses relating to spirituality and spiritual practice. In addition, many books and videos on spirituality are now available free over the internet. Specific examples include Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's complete works, the works of many of their disciples, and videotaped interviews with many other disciples, which are available online. On a broader social level, there are numerous activist movements working through social media and the internet on various progressive social causes. It is also becoming increasingly difficult for governments and other large organizations to conceal their nefarious activities or to censor information they prefer to be kept hidden.

Nevertheless, all of this technological progress can take us only so far; at some point we need to take a leap to another level beyond mind and a technologically sophisticated life. Reading about spirituality and spiritual practices, or listening to others speak about them, will not fundamentally change us. At long last we will need to take up spiritual practice and work at it intensely and persistently if we want to find our souls and enter into the underlying spirit of existence in which we will finally find lasting peace and human unity.



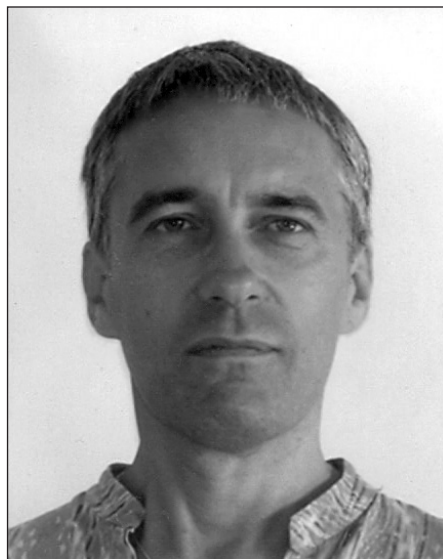
The descending path

by James Anderson

Reprinted from NAMAHA, July 2011.

NAMAHA editor's note. The following article describes a personal journey towards an integral healing and realignment of the entire personality through the processes of Integral Yoga. Although each of us experiences the yoga journey in a unique way, this article brings out some key elements and central processes of the Integral Yoga that stand as universal constants. It rightly points out that the ultimate way out of human problems and issues, whether of health or otherwise, is the way within. All yogic traditions recognise this need of going within and looking from within. However, the Integral Yoga teaches us also how to bring out this inmost core and exercise its influence upon the without, on our surface consciousness, our body and eventually even upon our external environment. But for this process to arrive at its fullness, there is needed, on the one side, a constant and sincere aspiration full of faith and surrender that ascends like a one-pointed flame of sacrifice from earth and, on the other side, a descent of the very highest Grace, the Peace and Wideness and Knowledge and Power and Ananda of the Divine Consciousness-Force, the One referred to as the Cit-Sakti in the Vedas and adored as Aditi, the Supreme Mother in the Tantras and the Puranas. While the two processes of ascent and descent go together, the focus of this article is on the descending path.

When you follow the ascending path, the work is relatively easy. I had already covered this path by the beginning of the century



and had established a constant relationship with the Supreme — That which is beyond the Personal and the gods and all the outward expressions of the Divine, but also beyond the Absolute Impersonal. It's something you cannot describe; you must experience it. And this is what must be brought down into Matter. Such is the descending path, the one I began with Sri Aurobindo; and there, the work is immense....

With Sri Aurobindo, we went down below matter, right into the Subconscient and even into the Inconscient. But after the descent comes the transformation, and when you come down to the body, and you attempt to make it take one step forward — oh, not even a real step, just a little step! — everything starts grating; it's like stepping on an anthill... And yet the presence, the help of the supreme Mother is there constantly; thus you realize that for ordinary men such a task is impossible, or else millions of lives would be needed — but in truth unless the work is done for them and the sadhana of the

body is done for the entire earth consciousness, they will never achieve the physical transformation, or else it will be so remote that it is better not even to speak of it. But if they open themselves, if they give themselves over in an integral surrender, the work can be done for them — they have only to let it be done (1).

There is clearly something very unusual about the journey one takes on the Integral Yoga. When I first came here, my initial reaction was probably not so uncommon. I had got accustomed to looking upwards for any change in my life. A need to rise higher and elevate my consciousness was clearly evident, so why on earth should I also cast my eye downwards in this search for the Supreme? I had been taught to climb the heights to attain the ultimate consciousness and, once reached, the whole task was done. So surely I should raise my awareness high above the madness of the everyday world. It seemed so obvious that the only answer was to be found there.

But gradually though, I drew a little guidance and discovered that unless a work of descent is also undertaken, any rise is likely to be very tenuous and insecure. We all need to build a solid base if we intend to climb in consciousness. Even a tree needs strong roots for its branches to reach for the sky.

More importantly though, the answer to our search is also to be found in the depths. Sri Aurobindo affirms that the godhead sits in the very heart of matter itself. Slowly I am coming to realise this fact for myself. We are told that there is not an atom in the entire universe that does not contain this presence. This, for me, is the central keynote of His path and so the work involves unlocking that hidden divin-



ity which lies in all things. It stands to reason too, that this presence is to be found in ourselves too: it just yearns for the fullest expression. Indeed I feel that this can be our unique agenda for life. So now it is just not possible to pursue any sādhanā without attending to the troughs of my nature.

Sri Aurobindo writes that:

The way of yoga followed here has a different purpose from others, — for its aim is not only to rise out of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness into the divine consciousness, but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body, to transform them, to manifest the Divine here and create a divine life in Matter. This is an exceedingly difficult aim and difficult yoga; to many or most it will seem impossible. All the established forces of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness are opposed to it and deny it and try to prevent it, and the sadhak will find his own mind, life and body full of the most obstinate impediments to its realisation. If you can accept the ideal wholeheartedly, face all the difficulties, leave the past and its ties behind you and are ready to give up everything and risk everything for this divine possibility, then only can you hope to discover by experience the Truth behind it (2).

Unique atmosphere

As time goes by, I have also come to appreciate just how unique the atmosphere here [at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram] really is. There is an immense Force which drives my consciousness inwards. It continually presses this

awareness onward into the truth of my being. Every time I live on the surface I act out of consonance with this energy and this situation can create an unbearable unease and friction. But this Force clearly works in another direction too, moving downward and transforming everything it touches. I have found it very advisable to follow this current. Eventually, I have found it impossible to swim against this immense tide: indeed if one has the slightest spark of sincerity it is very difficult to proceed in any other direction.

So this pressure is very evident here. Indeed it amounts to a tangible sensation that can be felt in the physical consciousness. When I first arrived at the ashram, I soon became aware of an uncomfortable vibration pressing down at the top of my head. Naturally it was the resistance that was causing this unease. I still feel a distinct sensation to this day, though the friction has gone. The feeling has now become reassuring and it is a reminder of the constant work being done. Such is the Force that insistently presses down on the lower nature and demands my fullest awareness.

A fascinating journey

Over time, I have also vividly observed how the yoga is done through (and not by) me. I often sense an unseen hand pulling me up to greater heights. But at the next moment, I might feel it pushing my attention down into the mire. This is clearly the hand that directs all our progress. Ultimately, we begin to realise that every realisation has to be eventually brought down and consolidated in matter. Surely we must rise first to gather ourselves for each descent. It is my experience that each movement, ascending and descending, occurs successively. It also takes

place spontaneously and so we often find ourselves drawn into a fascinating journey of steep climbs and sheer descents. As ever however, the Mother says, such words do not totally convey the complete essence of this path:

What I call a descent is the individual movement, in an individual consciousness... Just as one speaks of ascent — there is no ascent, you see: there is neither above nor below nor any direction, it is a way of speaking — you speak of ascent when you have the feeling of rising up towards something; and you call it a descent when, after having caught that thing, you bring it down into yourself (3).

The reason for all this is very clear. The consciousness we gather at the summits must then come down to transmute the abysses of our nature. But it is often a journey of blood, sweat and tears. At times it is truly a war of attrition.

Sri Aurobindo says that,

There must be a descent too to affirm below what we have gained above: on each height we conquer we have to turn to bring down its power and its illumination into the lower mortal movement; the discovery of the Light for ever radiant on high must correspond with the release of the same Light secret below in every part down to the deepest caves of subconscious Nature. And this pilgrimage of ascension and this descent for the labour of transformation must be inevitably a battle, a long war with ourselves and with opposing forces around us which, while it lasts, may well seem interminable (4).



A greater power

So in this yoga, we don't initiate; we simply follow. We can't expect to unlock this hidden divinity ourselves; a greater power will always act. I find that every time my mind tries to take the reins, the flow gets somehow interrupted. We evidently need a greater consciousness than the one we possess to complete the process. I feel that we have to learn to follow the rhythm of the practice and we can only collaborate by simply staying attentive and awake.

Indeed, if I do try to initiate, it really only amounts to 'pulling' and I am likely to come to serious grief. In such circumstances, I'm only trying to embark on work that I'm not really ready for. As the Mother says, we have to learn to surrender. We are indeed fortunate to possess that point of surrender and we have the opportunity to lay everything at our Mother's feet. Indeed, in this attitude, I believe that it is She who does the work through us. Sri Aurobindo says that once this knowledge is embraced, the sādhanā becomes easy. It is getting there that is more difficult.

When I first came here, this descent seemed to start very quickly indeed. My first instructions came almost before I had taken the chance to substantially digest Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's teachings. One day, the Mother visited me during sleep and pointed me down to a dark and dreary basement and told me that that was to be my allotted place of work. There was no mistaking the clarity of these instructions. But I did find them quite perplexing as my practice had up to

that point been paving the way towards higher climbs. But it was as if I had been assured that there would be no more steep ascents until my feet were more firmly planted on the ground! Looking back, from that point, the whole nature of my work here has dramatically changed and my experiences from then on have assumed a new shape. To this day, the focus of my attention has largely shifted down to this basement and it is work that naturally gravitates down to the body.

On this descending path, the body is not something we can afford to leave by the wayside. If we ever do so, we can

But it is also my understanding that only living in the soul can produce the definitive change. Getting there, we all know, requires considerable practice and an unfailing aspiration. Concentration is one very direct way. And once that essential contact is made, its radiance can be allowed to expand and change everything it touches.

rest assured that it will always drag us back. There is a great war being waged and it is here that victory must be won. Sri Aurobindo himself has affirmed that man's evolution has reached a critical stage and the body has become a crucible for the transformation itself.

The process

From the very beginning of my life here, it became very clear to me that if the state of this body was ever going to move forward my inner nature would inevitably have to change first. It would seem logical that this process of change would begin at the top and gradually work downwards. I don't know if my example was at all peculiar, but from the outset most of my attention seemed to naturally polarise onto the vital.

But the challenges that were being faced by the body meant that work on the physical nature had to start immediately too. So from those days onward, the two sides have proceeded in an almost parallel fashion. At least that has been my intention. Furthermore I can rarely afford to look at one part in isolation; everything is so interconnected. Any work on the body inevitably follows a detailed work of aligning the whole being inside. For me, this feature makes the sādhanā truly interesting because the work of inner harmony always needs to be reinforced by a remodelling of the nature outside. This

integral path is really my only way forward; it entails a combination of material and more subtle approaches. So the axiom of Sri Aurobindo, that 'the two ends can meet'

not surprisingly comes to mind.

Concentration

But it is also my understanding that only living in the soul can produce the definitive change. Getting there, we all know, requires considerable practice and an unfailing aspiration. Concentration is one very direct way. And once that essential contact is made, its radiance can be allowed to expand and change everything it touches. It is at moments such as these that our nature can become the focus of attention. Depending on our inclination, I guess, we can either look upon it from a great height or from great depth.

However, Sri Aurobindo often says that it is easier to find the psychic and achieve realisation there, before rising up to those higher reaches of the



mind. But whichever way we adopt, both require a persistent and unflagging will, the sort of commitment that can only be derived from the true Source itself.

Nevertheless Sri Aurobindo is quite explicit in stating that the vehicle for transformation is indeed the soul.

The supramental change can take place only if the psychic is awake and is made the chief support of the descending supramental power (5).

I don't think we should delude ourselves: this can be a very long road. So, for me, taking detours doesn't appear to make much sense. The light of the soul clearly presents me with the best guide for this difficult work of descent.

And it is precisely at the point of greatest difficulty that I must direct and keep my gaze. But something in me very often wants to veer away from that point of concentration. At such times, it simply doesn't want to experience the difficulty and so tries to shy away. That must certainly be a sign that the psychic consciousness is not present as, I suppose, there would be no recoil if I were entirely under its influence. The soul spontaneously harmonises and it doesn't need to immerse itself in what it sees. It always remains intact. I feel that it is largely the discomfort and distaste of the mind which brings about this retreat.

I find it a little paradoxical that the further I disengage from the ground, the sharper my focus usually becomes of the earth itself. If I want to keep myself open for any descent, my eyes must obviously be cast downwards. However, if I identify with what I see, the vision tends to get blurred and out of focus. I also become

enmeshed in what I face. The key is to disinterestedly observe but not get entangled in what I witness. This kind of poise has an executive action too because the consciousness is invariably accompanied by the Force itself.

Sādhana of the body

The point that the Mother makes about the body is generally well understood. It is when the sādhana comes down to it that the practice becomes really problematic. Comparatively speaking, there is a rigidity in the physical consciousness that defies any true change. There can at times be an almost unbearable friction when I work with this body. However, I don't believe I'm much of an exception, although my situation may be a little more extreme. And yes, I find that sometimes it does truly grate.

An unyielding persistence is always required. But I feel that I don't really have an alternative. Surely it is a Grace that I have been blessed with it because, to be quite honest, I'm not sure whether I would have ever assumed the work in the first place had the physical been in prime condition. In a very true way, the body has actually carried me to the Mother's feet. It also teaches me humility. I even have the feeling that many of its lessons might even become imprinted on my consciousness forever.

Gradually my relationship with the body has changed. In my eyes now, the body fully completes the circle. Whatever the difficulties, it offers me the prospect of a greater integrality and wholeness. There is a feeling of totality whenever I consciously live and work with it. Whenever I separate from the body, I now feel an important part of me is actually separating from the Divine itself. Whenever I try to sit up in the clouds, a crucial link

becomes missing. From time to time, I find myself quite often disengaging from it and I then wonder why the same joy and plenitude are absent. So that is clearly one important reason: to be wholly present in my body brings me so much closer to my true base.

In my work with the body, so much time is spent going back and recovering lost ground. But I feel that this is very important; there is an enormous task of preparation and rebuilding after all. I believe that is the essence of work with the body. But I am aware that if I intend seeing the process through to its end I eventually need to go beyond. But that stage is entirely outside the range of any personal effort. It takes more than effort to unearth the truth inside and it is only by living in this truth that any spontaneous shift can be made. It is only by keeping this consciousness entirely intact that the 'perpetual miracle' can manifest.

Integration

The Integral Yoga teaches us to look at the whole. It clearly demonstrates that every part of our instrumental nature is intricately connected and any disruption inside will inevitably surface on the outside too. No part can be looked upon in isolation: we have to learn to integrate our awareness too.

On this descending path, I also find that so much time is spent in the task of alignment. It is my understanding that every part of our nature needs to be harmonised around its true centre. If the body is to be made plastic enough to open to the descending Force, I believe that this work must be repeatedly undertaken. Nothing can really be taken in isolation and if the lower nature is overlooked, the body too will become encrusted with neglect. Eventually, that



essential light will disappear. A light may, of course, still shine and even dazzle from inside but eventually the exterior will only become grey and lifeless, a little like a soiled rag.

The subconscious

Sooner or later though, as we work on the body, we inevitably come up against a colossal block of resistance. Sometimes, in my experience, as I manage to move an inch forward, I have eventually felt a counterweight that presses to push me back. I don't believe my ordeal is in any sense unique. According to Sri Aurobindo, if we embark on a path of growth, it is one universal hurdle we all have to overcome:

The subconscious is the main cause why all things repeat themselves and

nothing ever gets changed except in appearance. It is the cause why people say character cannot be changed, the cause also of the constant return of things one hoped to have got rid of forever. All seeds are there and all Sanskaras of the mind, vital and body,— it is the main support of death and disease and the last fortress (seemingly impregnable) of the Ignorance. All too that is suppressed without being wholly got rid of sinks down there and remains as seed ready to surge up or sprout up at any moment (6).

Unless we give attention to our physical consciousness, I feel that it is inevitable that the body will get caught

in this net of habit. From a personal perspective, I am becoming increasingly aware of how habit so stifles the body. Somehow the cycle has to be broken. The subconscious is the source of most of this habit and its twisted patterns can only be erased by an unflinching will to accept the Force and Light into our whole being. It is simply too big a battle to take on singlehanded:

When the physical consciousness is being changed, the chief resistance comes from the subconscious. It is constantly maintaining or bringing back the inertia, weakness, obscurity,

Somehow the cycle has to be broken. The subconscious is the source of most of this habit and its twisted patterns can only be erased by an unflinching will to accept the Force and Light into our whole being. It is simply too big a battle to take on singlehanded...

lack of intelligence which afflict the physical mind and vital or the obscure fears, desires, angers, lusts of the physical vital, or the illnesses, dullnesses, pains, incapacities to which the body-nature is prone.

If light, strength, the Mother's Consciousness is brought down into the body, it can penetrate the subconscious also and convert its obscurity and resistance (7)."

Initially, I feel that this is the only way. If we attempt to open our whole nature to this Force, and particularly our bodies, sooner or later it is going to filter down into this realm below. The stress of the practice will determine this.

Going deeper

But perhaps, with a more probing consciousness, one can go even further. If we can somehow consciously trace the source of these repetitive patterns, I believe that the knowledge we receive will inevitably bring light even to this most dismal fortress. For me, the light of this knowledge is just another aspect of the Mother's Consciousness. If we can sincerely identify with That, I am certain this Light will eventually prevail.

Even on a more superficial level, we can become at least partially aware of how this hidden presence so am-

biguously impels our lives. An attitude of introspection and enquiry is bound to help. It is certainly interesting to try. From my experience, I find it fascinating to see how many of my movements, inside or out, can

be tracked back to this part of my nature. But that is what a little drop of knowledge gives us: it helps one to understand the origin of all one's movements. And I believe that once the knowledge of this consciousness fully reigns over our entire being, all obscurity will naturally dissolve. Ultimately, after all, an important aim of this descending path is to go down and make everything awake. Ultimately, I believe, the Truth can only descend where consciousness resides.

Inner work

So in time, an understanding has slowly deepened. Sometimes, when I work inside, I find my attention goes down to these ill-lit domains. I don't try



to steer the awareness into any particular direction; rather it tends to happen of its volition. Very often too, I have felt a guiding hand escort me through this difficult terrain. Each one of us has our own unique point of reference. Mine happens to be the Mother. Looking at this truth candidly, I have no need of anyone or anything else. For me, it is the touch of the Mother that illumines every part of the nature.

As I scan from top to bottom, my attention may be drawn to a breakdown of the Force running through the body. That point of focus may well be one of weakness or pain. If

I am attentive enough, it will then try to follow that distortion back to its hidden source. At the very root of the constriction, I might discern some darkness trying to bury itself away from the light. I don't need to label it, but by watching closely, a spontaneous knowledge emerges and I find myself looking down close to the bottom of my being. Words aren't really necessary and I then direct all my attention onto that spot and wait for it to gradually open and unfold. A patient attitude is always required. When that happens, the darkness recedes and a light and peace inevitably intervene. At the end, there is such an intimacy in the work: it is truly exquisite. As this Presence comes, such a force and light invariably descend into the body. Eventually it goes right down to the feet and into the earth.

These are precious moments and it is then that the body can awaken to its own true nature. I do feel that these moments can be extended. I always try

to be mindful of disengaging slowly from any work inside. In the end, everything will draw back to the surface but if the transition can be performed in a more seamless way, the action of the Truth can persist on the surface too. It is a matter of consolidation and the solution, I feel, is to try to make a link between these two sides of our nature. It is also a question of always widening our usual boundaries. So if we allow this awareness to expand as the inside becomes aligned, the outer nature will also broaden into a greater sense of freedom.

In my experience, opening the body to the Force is, quite simply, the essence of this descending path. But in truth, that presence is already there: it just has to be truly acknowledged for the body to express its innate divinity. Everything must be made conscious.

The lifeline

I believe that one essential key is never to lose hold of our lifeline with the soul. Without the psychic poise, I only stumble around in the darkness. Invariably too, the further down I go, the more resistance I shall usually meet. So this lifeline becomes increasingly imperative. Eventually I will arrive at a zone where nothing changes unless something very radical is done. It is quite out of my hands. Sometimes the scenes which confront me can be very bleak; but that often comes with the work. We sometimes have to keep an inner smile amidst the grimmest surroundings. Something inside has to remain centred and true amidst the chaos and madness. We can all picture our worst nightmare: but is it still possible to keep this station in such a setting? An abiding trust is our

ultimate safeguard.

At first I found that I needed to align myself each time this path was resumed. Really though, the path never ceases and I now realise that this poise must eventually be kept at all times, irrespective of circumstances or conditions. That is the gauntlet each of us ultimately has to take. We have to meet a greater call as we walk further down this path. That is the call of the Mother and of the soul and our response to it surely provides the basis for all progress and growth.

Opening

In my experience, opening the body to the Force is, quite simply, the essence of this descending path. But in truth, that presence is already there:

it just has to be truly acknowledged for the body to express its innate divinity. Everything must be made conscious. What is involved must necessarily evolve but it is my understanding that the shift will hasten enormously through our detailed observation. It is well known that yoga means 'joining' and we also know that the Integral Yoga involves a joining of spirit with matter. So the two ends must meet for the path to reach its complete destination. It is a detailed fusing. At that point, if we open ourselves wide enough, we may even find that they were not so far apart after all. Indeed at the point of realisation, we will probably see that the two ends are indeed one.

I believe that this opening is a function of the soul. However, I sometimes find it so tempting to shut the doors and keep that presence locked



away inside my heart. It seems so sublime that there sometimes appears no point in releasing it! But that presence can descend; it can also radiate outwards. It can expand too. In fact I feel that if one is walking this path, this is what it must do. The gaze has to widen so the same intensity can spread throughout and beyond the body itself. That, for me, is opening.

Calling the peace

So when I engage in this work, I might initially notice a certain feeling of reticence as I start my process. For example, when I call peace down into the body, at the beginning, I might initially sense the presence getting diluted. But it is not the presence that causes this movement. It is evidently the receptivity of the body itself (and other nature) to the new light and force. However, I try to persist; I need to experience the infusion to the very end. So I call peace into every part of the body, from top to bottom. I even call it into all my nerves, tissues and cells. I call it into the breath too. I invariably end at the feet. I actually say the words and that presence tangibly pervades each area. In the end, there is such a feeling of expansion and wholeness. Ultimately there is no sense of diminution, only a quite dynamic vastness.

Actually it is this peace that is the salvation for this body. It not only replenishes but its unique action helps it to move ahead with much greater confidence. This peace must always be nurtured; it is our birthright but somehow gets lost in the madness

of the everyday world. But I believe that this Peace can be brought down into everything, not least the world. The Mother has demonstrated how her peace and consciousness can be infused and locked away inside the smallest cell. This single cell can even symbolise the earth itself and surely that is a key to the immortality that lies waiting in man.

The final bar

It is indeed interesting to notice how faithfully this body reflects whatever is contained inside. The further I

So I call peace into every part of the body, from top to bottom. I even call it into all my nerves, tissues and cells. I call it into the breath too. I invariably end at the feet. I actually say the words and that presence tangibly pervades each area. In the end, there is such a feeling of expansion and wholeness.

proceed, the more precise this mirror-image becomes. I now believe that, at least for myself, a complete state of normality will only be achieved once everything is aligned and purified inside. That is called harmony. But the ego is always the final bar. We spend years and years consciously constructing our individuality but then eventually we find that we have to give it all back for the final work to unfold.

But I have a feeling that a long time ago the soul accepted this challenge, for this lifetime at least. It is such an intriguing test. I am now convinced that only the Grace supported by the soul has the capacity to transform, let alone radically change the body. That is why we are surely best advised to make some attempt to live in it. I guess that attaining this knowledge can be a long undertaking, maybe spanning several

lives, but as we travel along the road we will surely begin to understand that every trace of separation must be effaced. One thing is certain: when all is said and done and as the last remnants of ego are finally laid to rest, we will want to pause a while and pay homage to her beautiful, descending path.

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You know, not a day passes without the observation that, not a dose, but a tiny little drop, an infinitesimal drop of That can cure you in a minute ("can," it DOES it, it's not that it "can"), that you are constantly in precarious balance and the slightest faltering means disorder and the end, and with just a drop of That ... it's all turned into light and progress. The two extremes. The two extremes side by side.

It's something one notes at least several times a day.

—The Mother, November 15, 1967, *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 8.



Gratitude

by Navni Gujral

Editor's note: Navni participated in an eight-month course on Indian approaches to psychology at the Indian Psychology Institute (IPI) in Pondicherry. The following is an introspective study examining the author's experience of gratitude in the light of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings. The illustrations were provided by Navni.



A self-willed man cannot be grateful—because when he gets what he wants he gives all the credit for it to his own will, and when he gets what he does not want he resents it badly and throws all the blame on whomever he considers responsible, God, man or Nature.¹

For the biggest chunk of my life I have been so wound up in my own little story that when we initially used the word “gratitude” during a course at the Indian Psychology Institute (IPI), I was so surprised at how, it sounded, at once so simple and obvious and yet so alien to my own experience. My world had always started and ended with me—the victories were mine to celebrate and defeats mine to bear or hurriedly get-over, there was no real place for anyone else.

Does something about gratitude come to mind when you ponder over your own experiences?



The ego thinks of what it wants and has not. This is its constant preoccupation.

The soul is aware of what it is given and lives in endless gratitude.²

Endlessly my mind was busy thinking on the things I didn't have- a salary like x, a passion for my job like y, a figure like z...I can go on and on; what then was there to be grateful for in a perpetual state of longing and wanting?

Moreover, by some luck when I managed to get something I was wishing for, too soon the novelty and pleasure wore off; it became routine and I wanted something new.

Does anything come to mind for yourself?

* * *

It is very difficult to keep up your gratitude; for a time it comes very strongly and again it goes back.³

Even the rare moments of gratitude that I can recall were so brief and dimmed as my attention always took me right back into a room full of thoughts about all that I hadn't yet accomplished, all that wasn't yet mine. Constantly transiting between messy thought-loops and feelings of inadequacy, I was so blind to all that I was lucky to have.

My gratitude toward others was always expressed in return for something tangible, by strong mechanical bursts of excitement (much like this huge empty speech bubble below) by repetitively thanking them out aloud and always promising something tangible back in return. Common reactions were: “I owe you big time!”, “just wait for what I'm getting you now! (without even having thought of anything).” The simple gratitude was lost somewhere so fast in all the noise—at most it was stored as a mental note on how I was to return the favor, and that too, often disappeared with time.



When the mind awakens to the awareness of the first psychic movements, it distorts them in its ignorance and changes compassion into pity or at best into charity, and gratitude into the wish to repay, followed, little by little, by the capacity to recognise and admire.⁴

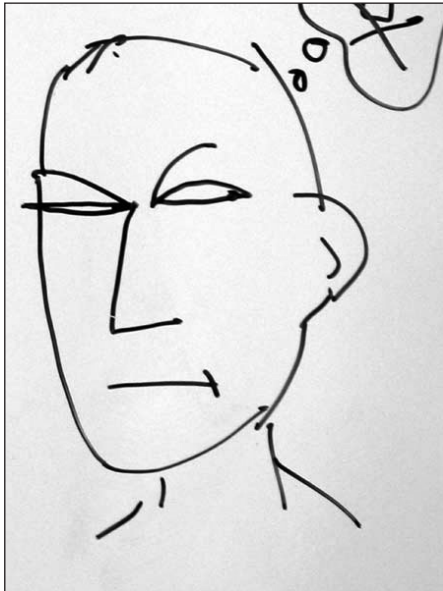
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Animals [...] They are not tormented by incessant thoughts like human beings. For example, they feel a spontaneous gratitude for an act of kindness towards them, whilst men, ninety-eight times out of a hundred, begin to reason



and ask themselves what interest one could have in being good. This is one of the greatest miseries of mental activity. Animals are free from this and when you are kind to them they are grateful to you, spontaneously.⁵

Having grown up in Delhi where one is constantly told to “watch out!” and “be safe!”, I recently realized on a vacation to Arunachal Pradesh how suspicious I had grown of human beings in general. As locals endlessly offered us lifts and directions and food and tips, I noticed how paranoid and suspicious I had become. Common thoughts were:



“What if they are taking us somewhere else?”

“Why is he smiling at me?”

“Will we need to pay them for their help?”

There was no place in my story to feel appreciative and grateful. I remember feeling so embarrassed and surprised while saying to my friends, “people here are so nice for ... no reason.”

Do any memories come to mind from your own life that may relate to

the quotes above?

* * *

People are not aware of the workings of Grace except when there has been some danger, that is, when there has been the beginning of an accident or the accident has taken place and they have escaped it. Then they become aware. But never are they aware that if, for instance, a journey or anything whatever, passes without any accident, it is an infinitely higher Grace. That is, the harmony is established in such a way that nothing can happen. But that seems to them quite natural. When people are ill and get well quickly, they are full of gratitude; but never do they think of being grateful when they are well; and yet that is a much greater miracle!⁶

When I try to recall occasions when I have felt spontaneously grateful I instantly think of:

1. The moment right after I have sped on highways into narrow spaces between other vehicles, shutting my eyes on the last second and hoping I would squeeze through.

2. When I was allowed to board a flight despite being half an hour late.

3. When my parents didn't catch my many lies despite being left alone with my friends on long (unplanned) occasions.

4. When I got well just in time to go for vacation.

That gratitude was always conditional; moreover, I almost only ever experienced it when what I considered a potentially negative situation, turned out to be unexpectedly positive.

Can you think of experiences when you've felt gratitude toward



someone or something?

Is it often conditional and dependent on factors such as those mentioned in my recollections or is it very different for you?

* * *

Two years ago when my marriage ended, I was left quite defeated. Amidst a messy aftermath, not knowing who to trust or where to look for guidance, I felt lost and anchorless. It was around then that I began to feel an unmoving presence within, higher than my ordinary self, taking over controls. Sick of my own incapability, I gradually began to let go of my clumsy, confused ideas about what was to be done.

As the presence grew stronger and more intimate to me, I knew I had met God. My words won't do justice to the experience, and yet I'll say that it felt like all the darkness and pain disappeared like little raindrops into an ocean of light. I had come upon something greater than anything I could have possibly wished for. Overwhelmed almost each day since then, I'm often filled with a strong sense of delight and gratitude for what I have been blessed with :) On most days I wake up thinking: “I still can't believe he's really there!”

That kind of sense of gratitude that the Divine exists; that feeling of a marveling thankfulness which truly fills you with



a sublime joy at the fact that the Divine exists, that there is something in the universe which is the Divine, that it is not just the monstrosity we see, that there is the Divine, the Divine exists. And each time that the least thing puts you either directly or indirectly in contact with this sublime Reality of divine existence, the heart is filled with so intense, so marvelous a joy, such a gratitude as of all things has the most delightful

Along similar lines, here is a poem I wrote for a project previously at IPI:

A yearning for something true
brought me to a tiny flame within
As I looked it in the eye,
it grew bigger and brighter.
I wanted more.
When did doubt betray me and
how did I get here?
Now I'm burning in a fire.
I hope the prayers I send you
are worthy of the all this grace
you shower back upon me.

Are there instances in your life that have given you a sense of something higher or deeper or larger than yourself? What was the experience like?

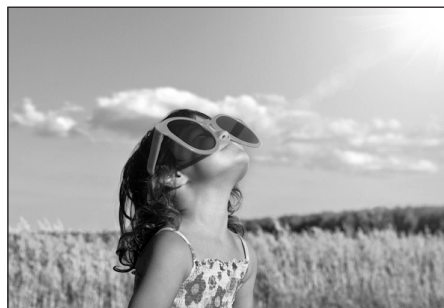
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And yet, of all movements, the one that perhaps gives the most joy—an unalloyed joy, untainted by egoism—is spontaneous gratitude.

It is something very special. It isn't love, it isn't self-giving. It is a very full joy. Very full.

It is a very special vibration unlike anything other than itself. It is something that widens you, that fills you, that is so fervent!

Of all the movements within the reach of human consciousness, it is certainly the one that draws you most out of your ego...⁸



Undoubtedly, it is during these moments that I feel the most free—there is no place for smallness, for clinging and insisting and wanting; at once it's all replaced by a wideness that comes from

spreading my arms wide upon and a silent smile that cannot thank enough, by an amazement at the secret that lay the whole time behind my self-obsessed little experience of life.

There is nothing left to ask for, save perhaps a strong hope to search deeper and appreciate more of this presence everywhere, in as many different ways as possible.

Can you recall moments when you felt a “spontaneous” gratitude? What was the experience like for you?

* * *

On a more recent journey to the hills in the north-east of India, as I reached my destination, this was what greeted me:





It's not that I hadn't visited beautiful places or snowed-out mountains before, but this time felt so different—because behind this mind-boggling painting of nature I so viscerally experienced the same presence: unmoving, silent, vast, filled with love. One with everything, a peace filled me; I was no longer a small little ME and I wanted nothing more at that moment. A widening that had previously been so alien to me, an openness, a strong wish to bow down in respect and then just merge into it all. When my cheeks grew tired of holding my smile, I remember saying to my best friend, “yo how can people still think god doesn't exist?!”

There is nothing which gives you a joy equal to that of gratitude. One hears a bird sing, sees a lovely flower, looks at a little child, observes an act of generosity, reads a beautiful sentence, looks at the setting sun, no matter what, suddenly this comes upon you, this kind of emotion—indeed so deep, so intense, that the world manifests the Divine, that there is something behind the world which is the Divine.⁹

Are there things within or without for which you feel unconditional gratitude?

* * *

Sometimes, when one sees a generous act, hears of something exceptional, when one witnesses heroism or generosity or greatness of soul, meets someone who shows a special talent or acts in an exceptional and beautiful way, there is a kind of enthusiasm or admiration or gratitude which suddenly awakens in the being and opens the door to a state,

a new state of consciousness, a light, a warmth, a joy one did not know before. That too is a way of catching the guiding thread.¹⁰



As a participant at the eight-month course held at IPI in Pondicherry, each of us took on a fairly intense journey of going inward. Often feeling vulnerable through periods of inner and outer turmoil, my mentors showed me an unwavering love and support that I had never known to have existed between humans (parents excluded and always taken for granted in my case). Through them I was able to see the divinity we are capable of, and wish dearly to express the same through myself one day. I felt much like this little dog above, being protected by a giant soul.

Here is a note that I had previously written to two of them:

Feels like there are gold coins of knowledge endlessly falling into my lap. Thank you so much for this space :) I'm finally so excited about the rest of my life. Torn between wanting to live all of it in one second to see what it holds and not wanting any moment to pass. Lots and lots of love...

Are there people or situations come to mind for you as well? What was it in them that made you feel that way toward them? How did you experience and express your gratitude?

* * *

And then there are those who have an innate faculty of gratitude, those who have an ardent need to respond, respond with warmth, devotion, joy, to something which they feel like a marvel hidden behind the whole of life, behind the tiniest little element, the least little event of life, who feel this sovereign beauty or infinite Grace which is behind all things.

I knew people who had no knowledge, so to say, of anything, who were hardly educated, whose minds were altogether of the ordinary kind, and who had in them this capacity of gratitude, of warmth, which gives itself, understands and is thankful.¹¹

Meet Laxmi Amma who has been cleaning at IPI for 10 years. A while ago she burnt both her legs almost entirely in a fire accident. I remember her coming and telling us at the end of class one day with a huge smile on her face that didn't leave for a second! When we initially expressed our concern





and asked worriedly about her pain, she pointed toward the sky and said in Tamil, “Mother is there.” Tears filled up in my friend’s eyes. At home we spoke about how we could never have such a faith or unwavering gratitude.

What a contrast it was to when I injured my knee earlier this year—fat tears streaming down my face as I stood on the terrace alone and glared at the sky saying, “WHY ME?!”

Have you come across people who innately possess this quality too? What makes them that way?

Where do you see yourself against this?

* * *

Be absolutely convinced that everything that happens, happens in order to give us precisely the lesson we needed, and if we are sincere in the “sadhana”, the lesson should be accepted with joy and gratitude.¹²

The last few years have brought me to many such situations that taught me to stop insisting that things go a certain way, to simply step back and allow something far wiser than my small-self to take charge of what was needed at the time.

And most often when I look back at the things I was complaining about, with time it becomes so clear why they needed to happen, how the thing was needed then for me to grow and learn.

Maybe I make it sound easier than it is, but certainly this realization has made me far more appreciative of all the people and situations that become part of my own experience. Regardless of my stumbling and changings judgments and opinions, my attempt is to take each situation as an opportunity to practice my yoga.

Can you recall incidents when you were miserable in a situation but later could appreciate that it was useful in some ways?

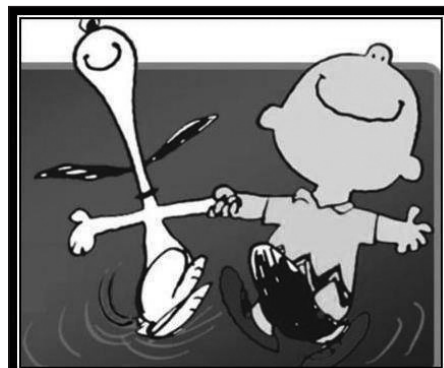
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I will close this essay with some small pointers for myself that are so simple to read but need much will and practice:

The best thing we can do to express our gratitude is to overcome all egoism in ourselves and make a constant effort towards this transformation.¹³

The best way to express one’s gratitude to the Divine is to feel simply happy.¹⁴

Physically, materially, upon earth, it is in gratitude that one finds the source of the purest delight.¹⁵



What if today, we were just grateful for everything?



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I have already written to you that our gratitude should go to the Divine and that as for men what is required is an attitude of goodwill, understanding and mutual help. To feel deeply, intensely and constantly a total gratitude towards the Divine is the best way to be happy and peaceful. And the only true way of expressing one’s gratitude to the Divine is to identify with Him. (The Mother (2004). CWM Vol. 16, p. 314).



Source material

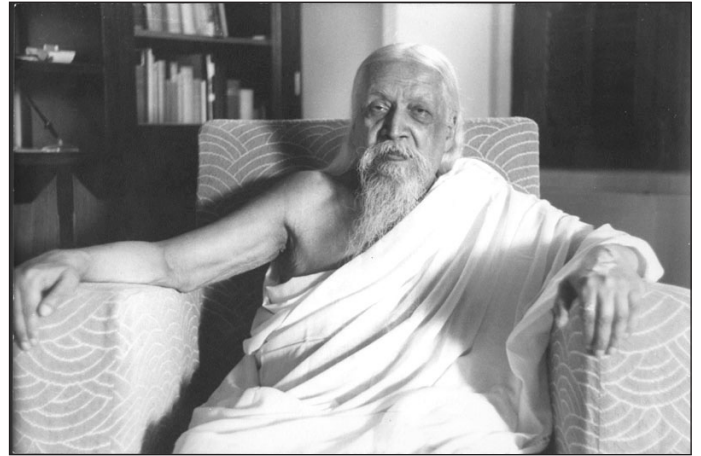
The divine guidance

by Sri Aurobindo

The question you have put¹ raises one of the most difficult and complicated of all problems and to deal with it at all adequately would need an answer as long as the longest chapter of *The Life Divine*. I can only state my own knowledge founded not on reasoning but on experience that there is such a guidance and that nothing is in vain in this universe.

If we look only at outward facts in their surface appearance or if we regard what we see happening around us as definitive, not as processes of a moment in a developing whole, the guidance is not apparent; at most we may see interventions occasional or sometimes frequent. The guidance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to understand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance. After all, real knowledge—even scientific knowledge—comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden process and causes. It is quite obvious that this world is full of suffering and afflicted with transience to a degree that seems to justify the Gita's description of it as "this unhappy and transient world", *anityam asukham*. The question is whether it is a mere creation of Chance or governed by a mechanic inconscient Law or whether there is a meaning in it and something beyond its present appearance towards which we move. If there is a meaning and if there is something towards which things are evolving, then inevitably there must be a guidance—and that means that a supporting Consciousness and Will is there with which we can come into inner contact. If there is such a Consciousness and Will, it is not likely that it would stultify itself by annulling the world's meaning or turning it into a perpetual or eventual failure.

This world has a double aspect. It seems to be based on a material Inconscience and an ignorant mind and life full of that Inconscience; error and sorrow, death and suffering are the necessary consequence. But there is evidently too a partially successful endeavour and an imperfect growth towards Light, Knowledge, Truth, Good, Happiness, Harmony, Beauty,—at least a partial flowering of these things. The meaning of this world must evidently lie in this opposition; it must be an evolution which is leading or struggling towards higher things out of a first darker appearance.



Whatever guidance there is must be given under these conditions of opposition and struggle and must be leading towards that higher state of things. It is leading the individual, certainly, and the world, presumably, towards the higher state, but through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering; none of the terms can be excluded until the higher status is reached and established. It is not and cannot be, ordinarily, a guidance which at once rejects the darker terms or still less a guidance which brings us solely and always nothing but happiness, success and good fortune. Its main concern is with the growth of our being and consciousness, the growth towards a higher self, towards the Divine, eventually towards a highest Light, Truth and Bliss; the rest is secondary, sometimes a means, sometimes a result, not a primary purpose.

The true sense of the guidance becomes clearer when we can go deep within and see from there more intimately the play of the forces and receive intimations of the Will behind them. The surface mind can get only an imperfect glimpse. When we are in contact with the Divine or in contact with an inner knowledge and vision, we begin to see all the circumstances of our life in a new light and can observe how they all tended without our knowing it towards the growth of our being and consciousness, towards the work we had to do, towards some development that had to be made,—not only what seemed good, fortunate or successful but the struggles, failures, difficulties, upheavals. But with each person the guidance works differently according to his nature, the conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of farther experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and movements help to determine our course; they may lead to much suffering



and evil, but through it all, the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness. All advance by however devious ways, even in spite of what seems a going backwards or going astray, gathering whatever experience is necessary for the soul's destiny. When we are in close contact with the Divine, a protection can come in which helps or directly guides or moves us; it does not throw aside all difficulties, sufferings or dangers, but it carries us through them and out of them—except where for a special purpose there is need of the opposite.

It is the same thing though on a larger scale and in a more complex way with the guidance of the world-movement. That seems to move according to the conditions and laws or forces of the moment through constant vicissitudes, but still there is something in it that drives towards the evolutionary purpose, although it is more difficult to see, understand and follow than in the smaller and more intimate field of the individual consciousness and life. What happens in a particular juncture of the world-action or the life of humanity, however catastrophical, is not ultimately determinative. Here too one has to see not only the outward play of forces in a particular case or at a particular time but also the inner and secret play, the far-off outcome, the event that lies beyond and the Will at work behind it all. Falsehood and Darkness are strong everywhere on the earth and have always been so and at times they seem to dominate; but there have also been not only gleams but outbursts of the Light. In the mass of things and the long course of Time, whatever may be the appearances of this or that epoch or moment, the growth of Light is there and the struggle towards better things does not cease. At the present time Falsehood and Darkness have gathered their forces and are extremely powerful; but even if we reject the assertion of the mystics and prophets since early times that such a condition of things must precede the Manifestation and is even a sign of its approach, yet it does not necessarily indicate the victory—even temporary—of the Falsehood. It merely means that the struggle between the Forces is at its acme. The result may very well be the stronger emergence of the best that can be; for the world-movement often works in that way. I leave it at that and say nothing more (*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 29, pp. 175-178).

1. The correspondent said that this unhappy world seems doomed to falsehood and suffering, for it is filled with selfishness, pettiness and heartless greed. Why should one embrace such a world, he asked, “where the divine guidance seems so accidental, almost out of place”?—Ed.

Love and the adverse forces

by the Mother

70—*Examine thyself without pity, then thou wilt be more charitable and pitiful to others. (Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Aphorisms)*

Very good! (*Mother laughs*) That's very good.

It's very good for everyone, isn't it?

Especially for those who think they're so superior.

But it really does correspond to something very deep.

This is exactly the experience I have been going through these past few days; since the day before yesterday it seems to have reached its peak, and this morning it developed into a comprehensive vision, an earth-encompassing vision.

It's almost like a reversal of attitude.

Actually, people have always taken themselves for victims hounded by adverse forces—the courageous fight back, the rest lament. But increasingly there has been a very concrete vision of the role the adverse forces play in the creation, of their almost absolute necessity as goads to make the creation progress and become its Origin again. And there was such a clear vision that one should accomplish one's own transformation—that's what we must pray for, what we must work out—rather than demand the conversion or abolition of the adverse forces.

And this is all from the terrestrial, not the individual standpoint (for the individual standpoint, it's quite clear): I am speaking from the terrestrial standpoint.

And there was the sudden vision of all the error, all the incomprehension, all the ignorance, all the darkness and—even worse—all the ill will in the earth's consciousness, which felt responsible for the prolongation of those adverse forces and beings and offered them up in a great... it was more than an aspiration, it was a sort of holocaust, so that the adverse forces might disappear, might no longer have any reason to exist, no longer need to be there to point out all that has to change.

The adverse forces were necessitated by all these negations of the divine life. And this movement of earth consciousness towards the Supreme, the offering of all these things with such extraordinary intensity, was a kind of reparation so that those adverse forces might disappear.

The experience was very intense. It crystallized around a small nucleus of experiences too personal to mention (because I wasn't the only one involved), which translated into this: “Take all my wrongdoings, take them all, accept them, obliterate them, and may those forces disappear.”



That's essentially what this aphorism says, seen from the other end. So long as a single human consciousness carries the possibility of feeling, acting, thinking or being in opposition to the great divine Becoming, it is impossible to blame anyone else for it; it is impossible to blame the adverse forces, which are kept in the creation as a means of making you see and feel how far you still have to go. (*silence*)

It was like a memory, an eternally present memory of that consciousness of supreme Love emanated by the Lord onto earth—INTO earth—to draw it back again to Him. And truly it was the descent of the very essence of the divine nature into the most total divine negation, and thus the abandonment of the divine condition to take on terrestrial darkness, so as to bring Earth back to the divine state. And unless That, that supreme Love, becomes all-powerfully conscious here on Earth, the return can never be definitive.

It came after the vision of the great divine Becoming. "Since this world is progressive," I was wondering, "since it is increasingly becoming the Divine, won't there always be this deeply painful sense of the nondivine, of the state that, compared with the one to come, is not divine? Won't there always be what we call 'adverse forces,' in other words, things that don't harmoniously follow the movement?" Then came the answer, the vision of That: "No, the moment of this very Possibility is drawing near, the moment for the manifestation of the essence of perfect Love, which can transform this unconsciousness, this ignorance and this ill will that goes with it into a luminous and joyous progression, wholly progressive, wholly comprehensive, thirsting for perfection."

It was very concrete.

And it corresponds to a state where you are so PERFECTLY identified with all that is, that you concretely become all that is antidivine—and so you can offer it up. It can be offered up and really transformed through this offering.

This sort of will in people for purity, for Good (which in

ordinary mentality is expressed by a need to be virtuous) is actually the GREAT OBSTACLE to true self-giving. It's the root of Falsehood, the very source of hypocrisy: the refusal to take up one's share of the burden of difficulties. And that's what Sri Aurobindo has touched on in this aphorism, directly and very simply.

Do not try to be virtuous. See to what extent you are united, ONE with all that is antidivine. Take up your share of the burden; accept to be impure and false yourself, and in so doing you will be able to take up the Shadow and offer it. And insofar as you are able to take it and offer it, things will change.

Don't try to be among the pure. Accept to be with those who are in darkness and, in total love, offer it all. (*silence*)

From the moment this was seen and DONE, the full power came back—the great creative Power. (*silence*)

Most likely the experience could take place only because the time had come for all this to be offered up.

The point is not to perpetuate those things, but to offer them up.

Because the time has come to manifest this Power, which is a power of Love—of LOVE, not merely of identity—of Love, of perfect Love; for perfect Love alone can offer.

It happened this morning, with great simplicity, but at the same time it had something so vast and almighty in it, as if the Universal Mother were turning towards the Lord and saying, "At last! We are ready."

That was my experience this morning.

Do you mean to say there's been a progress on Earth?

Yes, on Earth; it's the Earth's history that's in question. Now?

In those realms, you know, "now" sometimes stretches over many years. I won't say it's going to be instantaneous; that, I don't know—I don't know. I will probably know in a few days.

It's like opening a door just a crack and catching a glimpse of what's beyond.... [*short passage omitted*] (*silence*)

[The experience] came to reverse the attitude, the attitude of struggling to surmount, subdue and abolish everything antidivine in creation.

Up till now, this attitude was probably (not probably—certainly) necessary to prepare things. But now there's a sort of sudden reversal, as if the moment had come for the creative principle, the force, the universal creative Force to say, "This too is Me. For it is time for it to disappear. This too is Me: I no longer treat it as an enemy to get rid of; I accept it as Myself, so that it truly does become Me." [*short final passage omitted due to limited space*] (*Mother's Agenda*, Jan. 21, 1962).



Book reviews

Integral Yoga at work: A study of practitioners' experiences working in four professional fields

Review by Martha Orton

This review appeared in the December 2016 issue of the SABDA Newsletter, published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

In this unique and engaging book, Larry Seidlitz shares his deep and comprehensive understanding of the Integral Yoga in the context of describing in-depth research on the role of work in the Yoga. Seidlitz's research into the application of the karma yoga aspect of the Integral Yoga reveals rich spiritual experiences in the lives of those he interviews and is intriguing and enlightening in its detailed discussion of the Integral Yoga as a whole. The book presents a valuable elucidation of karma yoga as essential to the Integral Yoga in both conceptual and concrete, pragmatic terms. More-over, because of the author's ability to concisely articulate concepts which are central to the Yoga without sacrificing their subtle aspects, *Integral Yoga at Work* can also be appreciated as a blueprint for practicing the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in life in general.

Integral Yoga at Work is the fruit of the author's qualitative research into experiences of sixteen long-term practitioners of the Integral Yoga. With a PhD in psychology, Seidlitz brings to his work an extensive background in the field of psychology and psychological research and an even lengthier background as a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and practitioner of the Yoga. The author provides essential context for his research by including an excellent introduction to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and also to basic concepts of the Integral Yoga. This is followed by discussion of research methodology, beginning with specific explanations of various recognized types of research approaches and progressing to how this current qualitative research relates to them. Seidlitz also points out the distinct nature and appropriateness of his methodology and why it does not aim to be detached and objective, but rather joins with the practitioners he interviews in their perspective on the truth of spiritual reality, practice and experience. Citing the ability to enter more deeply into the meaning of the experiences involved, he writes: "Rather than skeptically examining or questioning them as an outsider, I utilize my

own experience in studying and practicing the Yoga to further elaborate on them and place them into the larger context which I share with the participants." (p. 23) The subsequent description and qualitative analysis is done through interviewing the participants in four broad categories of work: management, education, health care, and the arts.

The reader receives the benefit of the author's ability to relate to, interpret and communicate the participants' observations and experiences. The sixteen participants, whose identities are concealed, included seven women and nine men, and equally represented general places of origin as described in terms of being from India or from Western countries. They ranged in age from 32 to 84 and had between eleven and more than thirty years of commitment to the Integral Yoga. Some work in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, some in Auroville, and some live and work at a distance and spend extended periods of time in either place.

Before examining the application of the Integral Yoga in the four broad areas of work identified for study, the book examines application to work in general, focusing discussion of the participants' experiences around quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which apply specifically to integration of work into life and the practice of the Yoga. Next, each of the four areas of work is explored, first by considering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's perspective on their significance and their observations about how best to approach each type of endeavor, and second by considering the participants' experiences working in these fields. The wisdom shared here, including the quoted passages, comprises rich and meaningful direction for living consciously in the world.

Experiences of the participants include narrative descriptions from each in which they express their perspectives on how they apply their understanding of the Integral Yoga in the specific types of work which they perform and also how this relates to their daily lives and overall spiritual experience and its integration into their lives. Seidlitz incorporates interpretive analysis into his discussion of the narrative reports and also, more comprehensively, into the conclusions on each of the four areas of work. Not surprisingly, in the process of making comparisons and drawing parallels between these, some significant common elements are revealed. Some of the frequently expressed themes which Seidlitz identifies are: "Merging of life, work, and yoga; Equality towards money...; Service as a motivation in work; Feeling the Divine's Presence in work; Feeling that one is an instrument of the Divine; Feeling connected with the Divine leads to harmony and efficiency in work;



Receiving concrete help from the Divine in work; Difficulties in work seen as part of the Yoga; Fulfillment in life and work.” (p. 45) These examples from the research findings can be seen as indicative of the truly dynamic and integral nature of the practice of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Before summarizing the broad implications of his research, Seidlitz provides additional context with an enlightening description of his personal experience of discovering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the subsequent journey which followed onto his awakening to the Integral Yoga, including his experiences of karma yoga. This also provides opportunity to incorporate interesting comparative descriptions of work in the Ashram and Auroville, in which some of the distinct characteristics of each, as well as similarities and contrasts, are noted. For those unfamiliar with either or both of these two foci of the Integral Yoga, this should be a particularly interesting aspect of Seidlitz’s discussion.

In focusing on the essence of applying the Integral Yoga in each of the four categories of work, Seidlitz develops an excellent summary of his research. He writes: “We all can apply the insights discussed in this book to act more consciously, with a remembrance of the divine Source of all action, and more in harmony with the divine Force that is in us and seeks expression through our work in the world, whatever that work may be.” (p. 178) Altogether *Integral Yoga at Work* makes a unique and significant contribution to the literature of the Yoga. It comprises a valuable resource for developing an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of karma yoga and the manner in which it is an essential component of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. *Integral Yoga at Work* also demonstrates concretely how work in the light of the Integral Yoga has the capacity to enrich individual development and facilitate one’s progress in the evolution of consciousness.

The English of Savitri, Vol. 2

Review by Larry Seidlitz

The *English of Savitri*, vol. 2 deals with Book Three, The Book of the Divine Mother. Shraddhavan, in her author’s note at the beginning, explains that whereas vol. 1 dealt with just Book One of *Savitri* [see my review in *Collaboration*, Fall 2015 issue], the very extensive Book Two with its 15 cantos was too daunting to be taken up immediately. *The English of Savitri* is based on the author’s

talks on Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem *Savitri*, which for Book Two extended over nearly two years, and which requires time consuming transcription and extensive editing. The relatively short Book Three, with just four cantos, was more readily available. The author, however, presents a 13 page summary of Book Two at the start of the book.

In her summary of Book Two, Shraddhavan quotes from a letter Sri Aurobindo wrote to Amal Kiran which puts Books One to Three into context. These books concern the yoga of Aswapati, Savitri’s father, whose yoga and ascent through all the planes of consciousness to a high summit bring him face to face with the Divine Mother and he implores her to come down to earth to hasten the advent of the divine life. She later incarnates as his daughter *Savitri*. Concerning Aswapati’s yoga, the quote reads:

First, he is achieving his own spiritual self-fulfilment as an individual and this is described as the Yoga of the King. Next, he makes the ascent as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness and this is described in the Second Book: but this too is as yet only an individual victory. Finally, he aspires no longer for himself but for all, for a universal realisation and new creation. This is described in the Book of the Divine Mother. [CWSA, 27:330]

Before proceeding through her detailed analysis, Shraddhavan also provides the reader with a helpful seven-page overview of Book Three. This summary helps to relate and convey the essences of its four cantos: The Pursuit of the Unknowable, The Adoration of the Divine Mother, The House of the Spirit and The New Creation, and the Vision and the Boon. This summary helps provides a clear overall picture of Book Three, which deals with the profound experiences of Aswapati on the summits of consciousness.

As in her first volume, Shraddhavan’s analysis is circumspect in avoiding speculative interpretation, but enriches our understanding by clarifying the meanings of words and lines, bringing out their often complex or hidden significances and subtle suggestions. This is especially valuable for nonnative English speakers, but will also surprise native English speakers with new meanings and deeper understandings. She also points out easily overlooked links between lines which may appear in different sections of the poem and she clarifies allusions to religious traditions or myths. In short, she helps the reader to more deeply understand and appreciate this unique and great spiritual epic by elucidating the meaning of its language.



The poetry room

From Savitri, The debate of Love and Death

In God concealed the world began to be,
Tardily it travels towards manifest God:
Our imperfection towards perfection toils,
The body is the chrysalis of a soul:
The infinite holds the finite in its arms,
Time travels towards revealed eternity.
A miracle structure of the eternal Mage,
Matter its mystery hides from its own eyes,
A scripture written out in cryptic signs,
An occult document of the All-Wonderful's art.
All here bears witness to his secret might,
In all we feel his presence and his power.
A blaze of his sovereign glory is the sun,
A glory is the gold and glimmering moon,
A glory is his dream of purple sky.
A march of his greatness are the wheeling stars.
His laughter of beauty breaks out in green trees,
His moments of beauty triumph in a flower;
The blue sea's chant, the rivulet's wandering voice
Are murmurs falling from the Eternal's harp.
This world is God fulfilled in outwardness.
His ways challenge our reason and our sense;
By blind brute movements of an ignorant Force,
By means we slight as small, obscure or base,
A greatness founded upon little things,
He has built a world in the unknowing Void.
His forms he has massed from infinitesimal dust;
His marvels are built from insignificant things.
If mind is crippled, life untaught and crude,
If brutal masks are there and evil acts,
They are incidents of his vast and varied plot,
His great and dangerous drama's needed steps;
He makes with these and all his passion-play,
A play and yet no play but the deep scheme
Of a transcendent Wisdom finding ways
To meet her Lord in the shadow and the Night:
Above her is the vigil of the stars;
Watched by a solitary Infinitude
She embodies in dumb Matter the Divine,
In symbol minds and lives the Absolute.
A miracle-monger her mechanical craft;
Matter's machine worked out the laws of thought,
Life's engines served the labour of a soul:

The Mighty Mother her creation wrought,
A huge caprice self-bound by iron laws,
And shut God into an enigmatic world:
She lulled the Omniscient into nescient sleep,
Omnipotence on Inertia's back she drove,
Trode perfectly with divine unconscious steps
The enormous circle of her wonder-works.
Immortality assured itself by death;
The Eternal's face was seen through drifts of Time.
His knowledge he disguised as Ignorance,
His Good he sowed in Evil's monstrous bed,
Made error a door by which Truth could enter in,
His plant of bliss watered with Sorrow's tears.
A thousand aspects point back to the One;
A dual Nature covered the Unique.
In this meeting of the Eternal's mingling masques,
This tangle-dance of passionate contraries
Locking like lovers in a forbidden embrace
The quarrel of their lost identity,
Through this wrestle and wrangle of the extremes of
Power
Earth's million roads struggled towards deity.
All stumbled on behind a stumbling Guide,
Yet every stumble is a needed pace
On unknown routes to an unknowable goal.
All blundered and straggled towards the One Divine.

—Sri Aurobindo

From The creed of my heart¹

A flame in my heart is kindled by the might of the morn's
pure breath;
A passion beyond all passion: a faith that eclipses faith;
A joy that is more than gladness; a hope that outsoars
desire;
A love that consumes and quickens; a soul-transfiguring
fire.
My life is possessed and mastered; my heart is inspired
and filled.
All other visions have faded; all other voices are stilled.
My doubts are vainer than shadows; my fears are idler
than dreams;
They vanish like breaking bubbles, those old soul-tortur-
ing themes.
The riddles of life are cancelled, the problems that bred
despair;
I cannot guess them or solve them, but I know that they
are not there.



They are past, they are all forgotten, the breeze has blown
them away;
For life's inscrutable meaning is clear as the dawn of day.
It is there—the secret of Nature—there in the morning's
glow;
There in the speaking stillness; there in the rose-flushed
snow.
It is here in the joy and rapture; here in my pulsing breast:
I feel what has ne'er been spoken: I know what has ne'er
been guessed.
The rose-lit clouds of morning; the sun-kissed mountain
heights;
The orient streaks and flushes; the mingling shadows and
lights;
The flow of the lonely river; the voice of its distant stream;
The mists that rise from the meadows, lit up by the sun's
first beam;—
They mingle and melt as I watch them; melt and mingle
and die.
The land is one with the water: the earth is one with the
sky.
The parts are as parts no longer: Nature is All and One:
Her life is achieved, completed: her days of waiting are
done.
I breathe the breath of the morning. I am one with the one
World-Soul.
I live my own life no longer, but the life of the living
Whole.
I am more than self: I am selfless: I am more than self: I
am I.
I have found the springs of my being in the flush of the
eastern sky.
I—the true self, the spirit, the self that is born of death—
I have found the flame of my being in the morn's ambros-
ial breath.
I lose my life for a season: I lose it beyond recall:
But I find it renewed, rekindled, in the life of the One, the
All.
I look not forward or backward: the abysses of time are
nought.
From pole to pole of the heavens I pass in a flash of
thought.
I clasp the world to my bosom: I feel its pulse in my
breast,—
The pulse of measureless motion, the pulse of fathomless
peace?
Am I freer than waves of ether, or prisoned beyond release?
I know not; but through my spirit, within me, around,
above,

The world-wide river is streaming, the river of life and
love.
Silent, serene, eternal, passionless, perfect, pure;—
I may not measure its windings, but I know that its aim is
sure.
In its purity seethes all passion: in its silence resounds all
song:
Its strength is builded of weakness: its right is woven of
wrong.
I am borne afar on its bosom; yet its source and its goal
are mine,
From the sacred springs of Creation to the ocean of love
Divine.
I have ceased to think or to reason: there is nothing to
ponder or prove:
I hope, I believe no longer: I am lost in a dream of love.

—Edmond Gore Alexander Holmes

Untitled²

My way is lost in winding woods;
The thick besetting night invades,
White radiance of beacon-stars
Behind the sloping mountain fades.

A pale remembrance lights the mind
Of an impetuous Spirit-call
Breaking the rocky distances
Like the rushing force of a water-fall.

But the vestal fire has sunk in ashes
That burned in my heart's immaculate urn,
Bright moments of a God-ward seeking
That fled and rarely still return!

Now I through dark long valleys grope,
Wandering like a lost midnight sun
In unseen subterranean worlds
Of dim inert oblivion!

When shall I hear thy voice again,
Redeemer of my failing soul,
fallen

And feel thy titan wings of light
Lift to thy heaven's gold aureole?

—Nirodbaran with
Sri Aurobindo's corrections



Invocations

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
Enter this sacred shrine.
Open our hearts to thy Peace.
We offer ourselves to thee.

Sweet Mother, be with us now.
Help us to feel thy Presence.
Grant us the gift of thy smile,
And thy transforming love.

Divine Mother, Sri Aurobindo,
We pray for openness to thy Force.
Be here with us now,
That we may feel thy influence.

Om Divine Mother,
Divine Consciousness and Force,
You are the flame of aspiration,
You are the light of knowledge,
You are the power of transformation,
You are the delight of existence.
We offer ourselves to thee.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Om Mother Divine,
Together you are the One Reality,
The source and aim of our existence,
Awaken us to thy constant Presence.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
Strengthen us in our aspiration,
Kindle in us a pure, bright flame
That carries us into your arms.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
Give us faith in our spiritual destiny,
Guide us to our spiritual fulfillment,
We aspire to be thy pure instruments.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
Help us to overcome all obstacles,
Lead us into the pureness of being,
Lead us into the fullness of love.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
We aspire to be divine warriors,
Who fight against the forces that oppose
Our progress and delay thy Victory.

Sweet Divine Mother,
Take us into thy Consciousness,
Enfold us in thy love's embrace,
Carry us in thy streams of bliss.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
Secretly, through many lives,
You have led us to this juncture,
In this life, lead us to realization.

Divine Mother, Sri Aurobindo,
We aspire to be true to thy call,
To give what is demanded of us,
To win thy victory over falsity.

Supreme Lord, Divine Consciousness
and Force,
Heal the division in our being,
Help us recover our unity with thee,
Help us to shed these age-old bonds.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
We pray that our aspiration may be
sincere,
That we may put aside falsehood,
And turn to thee alone.

Supreme Lord, Divine Mother,
Show us the way to our inner Self,
Help us to concentrate always on thee,
May our psychic beings fully emerge.

Supreme Lord, Divine Mother,
Turn our lives exclusively to thee,
Remove from us our clinging past,
Lead us straight in thy paths of light.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Divine Mother,
Help us to be sincere in our practice,
Let our aspiration be strong and
vibrant,
Give us the courage to reject desire,
And surrender ourselves into thy
hands.

Sweet Divine Mother,
We offer all our lives to thee,
Let us hold nothing back
From this sacred sacrifice.

Om Divine Mother, Sri Aurobindo,
We pray that you guide us to the goal,
That you awaken in us a deep aspira-
tion
To follow your lead and not stray
from the path.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
We aspire to know thy will,
To be free from all prejudice,
And to be open to thy guidance.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
Open all our being to thy Light.
Our minds, hearts, lives, and bodies
Aspire to be thy conscious instruments.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
Open us to thy transforming force,
Enter and fill our minds and hearts,
Penetrate our vitals and bodies.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
Open our hearts and minds,
Help us to see you in all things,
And to consecrate all our acts.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
May we always turn to thee
For direction in our lives,
For each decision and action.

Divine Mother, Sri Aurobindo,
We pray we may open to your Presence,
Help us to concentrate always on thee,
And be receptive to your spiritual
force.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
May thy peace and light surround us,
Fill us with thy sweet Presence,
Grant that we may live in thy Truth.

Om Sri Aurobindo, Mother,
We give thanks for your constant gifts,
For your grace that fills our lives,
May we be worthy of your solicitude.

—Larry Seidlitz



The flutter of rapture³

The song of the conch ripples in my breath
Hark, O friend, the song of the conch rings in my breath.

This is not a matter of one auspicious moment
This is a fact that flows like time, all the while.
I inhale, leap and keep floating like a puff
And my being stretches to spaces beyond.

The atoms in my being resound
Echoing the airs crooned in perfect tune
To the tap of a tombourine.
Ho-ji-ho, the chanting cheer, the flawless airs.
Hark, O friend, the song of the conch rings in my breath.

A brilliant lamp is burning day and night.
All the cells of my body are forever bright.
The blood that in my veins circles up and down
Is my prayer in a rhythmic, luminous sway
Uttered in silence the whole year round.
My limbs fly and flap like a banner
Lost in the flutter of absolute rapture!

Ho-ji-ho, the flutter of absolute rapture . . .
Hark, O men, the song of the conch rings in my breath.

Dhirendra Mehta
(Translated by Dhanavanti)

A taste in the mouth⁴

O unknowable land
of familiar stories,
your secrets concealed
behind invisible masks
for us to uncover.

A teasing now and again,
sparkles and glimpses
that hide before they show.

A taste in the mouth
just enough to know
there's nowhere else to be,
nothing else to do.

Lured by your mystery,
holding in a wait

that never ends
and never begins.

The louder you whisper
the less I know,
the less I know
the more I am.

—Navni Gujral

Last give and take⁴

One day a sick pauper
undid the knots
that tied his tattered coat together.

Down fell the murk
free came the stench
from fresh red wounds
that secretly loved their colour.

He collected his dirt in a bowl
and took it to the sea
and spoke with the dancing waves.

“This will be my last give and take.
Year after year
the greedy holes in my coat
ask for more to fill their hunger.
It's empty pockets openly refuse
to store away my fear.
What use is such a cover?
Slaughter me naked instead!”

A glistening smile from the sea
delivered him a message
in a sun-lit bottle.

“Tired little pauper,
In exchange for your imaginary coat
I trade with you a secret.
I swim inside you and
your wish is my command.”

—Navni Gujral

¹Alan Jacobs (ed.; 2002). *Poetry for the Spirit*. London: Watkins.

²Nirodbaran (2015). *Collected Poems with Sri Aurobindo's comments and corrections*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

³Reprinted from *Mother India*, September 2016 issue.

⁴Indian Psychology Institute website: www.ipi.org.in/blogs



Apropos

Be not deceived by men's show of virtue, neither disgusted by their open or secret vices. These things are the necessary shufflings in a long transition-period of humanity. —Sri Aurobindo

It is always good to look within oneself from time to time and see that one is nothing and can do nothing, but afterwards one must turn one's eyes to Thee, knowing that Thou are all and Thou canst do all. —The Mother

Be humble for you are made of earth. Be noble for you are made of stars. —Serbian proverb

Life is really simple, but men insist on making it complicated. —Confucius

All major religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion and forgiveness ... the important thing is they should be part of our daily lives. —Dalai Lama

You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection. —Buddha

Nothing ever goes away until it has taught us what we need to know. —Pema Chödrön

This above all; to your own self be true. —William Shakespeare

When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy. —Rumi

Man has no body distinct from his soul; for that called body is a portion of soul discerned by the five senses, the chief inlets of soul in this age. —William Blake

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. —Lewis B. Smedes

As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world—that is the myth of the atomic age—as in being able to remake ourselves. —Mohandas Gandhi

The first step toward change is acceptance. Once you accept yourself, you open the door to change. —Will Garcia

The more conscious you become, the more aware you become of how unconscious you've been. —Patricia Sun

Our prayers are answered not when we are given what we ask, but when we are challenged to be what we can be. —Morris Adler

How do we nurture the soul? By revering our own life. By learning to love it all, not only the joys and the victories, but also the pain and the struggles. —Nathaniel Branden

We don't see things as they are. We see things as we are. —Anais Nin

Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future. —Oscar Wilde

The best teachers are those who show you where to look but don't tell you what to see. —Alexandra K. Trenfor

If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough. —Meister Eckhart

If you concentrate on finding whatever is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul. —Rabbi Harold Kushner

Self-discipline begins with the mastery of your thoughts. If you don't control what you think, you can't control what you do. —Napolean Hill

True religion is the life we lead, not the creed we profess. —Louis Nizer

