

# Collaboration

Spring 2017

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

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**The surging wave by Seabury Gould • Surrender by Kalyna Temertey-Canta •  
The First Nations and the soul of America by Karen Mitchell •  
Are you still a Muslim? Memories of a happy Islam by Zackaria Moursi •  
Karma by Martha Orton • A short course in Integral Yoga by Matthias Pommerening •  
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry room • Apropos**



## About the art on the front and back cover

Front cover: Painting by Dakshina, "Mother descending." Back cover: Mother's symbol in flowers for the April 24th darshan at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, Lodi, CA.

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## From the office of Collaboration

In this issue, Current affairs starts us off with an article about the upcoming All USA Meeting (AUM) to be held in August in Amherst, MA. Matthew Andrews, the main coordinator for the event, gives some background about himself and how he came to host this year's conference. This is followed with Briefs, which has several announcements from our USA centers and collaborators.

AV almanac presents two articles by Manas Chakrabarti about two alternative education opportunities in Auroville. In the first, a "place-based" initiative, students move around to various venues in Auroville to learn. In the second initiative, a website puts educators of particular skills and activities in touch with interested students. These activities range from various fine arts and crafts to sports, martial arts, and yoga.

In our Salon section, we have an essay by Seabury Gould on the magic of the written word, and an essay by Kalyna Temertey-Canta on her experience of the power of surrender during her recent visit to Pondicherry and Auroville.

Our first feature in Chronicles is the first of a four-part series by Karen Mitchell examining the relation of the First Nations, the American Indians, with the soul of America. Here Karen explores her own encounters and developing interest in the peoples of the First Nations. The second feature in Chronicles is by Zackaria Moursi. It concerns his personal experiences of Islam growing up as a Muslim in Egypt, as well as his reflections on the current perceptions and developments of Islam around the world.

In Essays, we have a scholarly examination by Martha Orton of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's views of karma. She explains that the laws of karma are not quite so ethical and mechanical as often thought, and that their driving force is our spiritual Self, and their *raison d'être* is the development and growth of our soul in its evolution on earth. Our second essay, by Matthias Pommerening, is the first of a two-part article on Integral Yoga. Based on readings in *Letters on Yoga II* that he summarized and discussed for on online course, this first installment concerns basic processes in the Integral Yoga, while part 2, to be presented in the next issue, will focus more specifically on its discipline of karma yoga.

In Source material, we have articles by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the principles and processes of rebirth and the soul's evolution, complementing Martha's essay. To further round out this theme, we have included in the Poetry room Sri Aurobindo's poem "Rebirth," as well as two other poems on spiritual evolution. There is also a wonderful poem on Auroville, and two other short poems by devotees. In *Apropos*, we close with a selection of inspiring 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. 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 by August 1, 2017 to the editor at: [editor@collaboration.org](mailto:editor@collaboration.org).

### 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.*

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

**About SAA:** The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current members: Lynda Lester, president; 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

### AUM 2017: Forward to the future

August 3rd–6th  
Amherst College; Amherst, Massachusetts

by Matthew Andrews

I first visited Auroville in 2000 with the Living Routes study abroad program, and I knew immediately that my dharma was interwoven with that of this place. By the time I left after staying for three months, I also knew that I had an inner relationship with the Mother, which manifested in a feeling of closeness and experiences of spontaneous adoration. Over many years this relationship has evolved, sometimes in silence and sometimes with strong pulses of inspiration and guidance.

Toward the end of last year I began feeling inspired to host the 2017 AUM conference in Amherst, MA. The path to manifestation evolved slowly, and I have often found myself groping forward into the unknown, unsure of what I was being asked to do. What I have felt from the beginning was that I should allow things to evolve organically, even if it meant that we got “behind schedule,” trusting that all would come in its own time. I also felt that this conference should enable a confluence of the streams of wisdom and love that have supported me in my own spiritual development. And I remembered that the Mother always encouraged her children to constantly step forward into the future, and to not allow ourselves or our aspirations to be defined by the past.

Shortly after my trip to India in 2000, I met Julie of Light Omega, and she has been a spiritual guide and teacher for me throughout the past 15 years. Her loving support has enhanced my life in countless ways, including my relationship with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. She strengthened my own capacity for discernment, and taught me to trust my inner experiences and seek love in the midst of fear. After returning from India in March, I convened a meeting of a small planning group (my wife Corinne Andrews, Will Moss, Klaus Buchele, Shari Hindman, and Amit Thakkar), and the opportunity arose for the group to meet with Julie. This meeting turned out to be quite significant, and several members of the group had profound experiences of connection to and alignment with Julie. The theme for the conference—forward to the future—emerged out of our meetings later in the day, and reflects our shared aspiration to create a space where something new can be born. Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s work was

always right on the cutting edge of cosmic evolution, often driving that edge forward into completely new terrain, and we seek to align with that adventurous spirit.

Julie was also changed by the meeting with the planning group. She describes it as a change to her physical body, and simultaneously a profound love for the Integral Yoga community has unexpectedly arisen and spread throughout her being. In the wake of this meeting and what has evolved since, the planning group decided to ask Julie to help us along the way and during the conference itself to create and hold a container into which something new might emerge.

I’m grateful that Patty Townsend will join us to bring the conference experience into our bodies, where the evolution of consciousness takes shape and becomes the evolution of matter. I’ve been studying yoga asanas and embodiment practices with Patty for years, and she is a master teacher when it comes to offering an experience of embodiment, of touching the place within us where consciousness and matter join and become one. She will take us on a collective journey inside our bodies and into the consciousness of our cells.

In addition to the confluence of these streams that have enriched my own life, a number of other amazing things have evolved. Tara Jauhar has accepted our invitation to attend. I first met Tara last October and was inspired by her in many ways, and deeply moved listening to her recite Sri Aurobindo’s poems and other works. She embodies the Mother’s relationship to organization and leadership, and it’s a great honor that she will be joining us. I’m also grateful that Nadaka, Gopika and Keshava have agreed to come and both play a concert on Saturday night, and be involved throughout the conference. They will add much to our collective adventure. As will Fif and Hamish from Mediclown Academy, and Margo MacLeod, who will share an experience of Awareness Through the Body. The conference will also host a preview of the documentary film *Conscious*, created by Alan Baiss and Joseh Garcia.

This conference feels deeply important to me for a number of reasons, including that the United States cries out for an infusion of energy from the soul of Auroville. The division and polarization that are playing out in so many spheres of life today represent forces of contraction reacting to the inner emergence of this nation’s soul, and we can support that emergence by joining together as diverse souls who aspire toward an embodied human unity. I hope that you will feel inspired to join us. All relevant info is available at [www.yogacenteramherst.com/aumconference](http://www.yogacenteramherst.com/aumconference). If you have any specific questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me at [matthew@yogacenteramherst.com](mailto:matthew@yogacenteramherst.com).



## Briefs

**The annual Sri Aurobindo Yoga Retreat** will be held June 28th–July 2nd, 2017 at Furman University in Greenville, SC. The theme for this event is: “Savitri: A new yoga for earth and man,” and will feature presenters Alok Pandey, Narad Eggenberger, Shraddhalu Ranade, and Lil-lah Schwartz. Further information and registration is available online at: <http://integrallyogaretreat.com>

**Matagiri update.** It has been over a year since Eric Hughes passed and soon it will be ten years since Sam Spanier died. Eric designated Julian and Wendy Lines to be his successors as “elders” of the Center and the five-member Board of Trustees additionally includes Danielle De Bollardiere, Tom Cowan and Brian Nagle.

The past few months have been focused on renovating the existing infrastructure by supporting the foundations and repairing the existing buildings, especially the log cabin where Sam and Eric lived and the Meditation Room, whose corner supports needed replacing. A new porch now provides a place to remove shoes before entering to meditate and the inside has been renovated with new insulation and sheet rock.

The biggest project is to build a new primary residence and garage. Wendy and Julian found a builder to construct a super-insulated straw bale house. The second floor will have a yoga room and three season space for informal talks and house concerts.

Julie Manna, a dance teacher from nearby Saugerties, NY will join the Matagiri community in an apartment above the garage. Julie visited Auroville three years ago and last summer attended Rod Hemsell's Savitri Retreat in Crestone.

Matagiri will host the All USA Meeting in 2018 as part of its 50th birthday observances August 2nd–5th.

**Foundation for World Education (FWE).** The FWE invites grant applications from individuals, programs and groups who share the vision for a transformed world espoused by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. All proposals must be presented to the FWE through the auspices of a nonprofit organization and are subject to review by members of the board before a decision is taken. Please email your proposal to the secretary at [info@foundationforworld-education.org](mailto:info@foundationforworld-education.org). If your organization is submitting a proposal for the first time, please include a copy of its nonprofit tax exemption status (or state the non-profit organization your grant would be channeled through). The deadline for our next main granting session is January 7, 2018.

**“Our Many Selves” talk available online.** “Our Many Selves: Moving toward Mastery of Our Complex Being,” a talk given by Lynda Lester at the AUM 2016 Integral Yoga conference, is now available in video format. This is a multimedia presentation that includes movie clips, music, and many colorful images. The presentation has seven parts: introduction, physical, vital, mental, purusha, psychic being, and quiz show.

The presentation explores the fact that, as Sri Aurobindo says, part of the foundation of Integral Yoga is to become conscious of the “embarrassing complexity” of our nature. We are composed of many personalities, each with its own complex individuality. These parts do not agree with each other and are all mixed together in our surface being. To master and eventually transform them, we must learn to identify with the witness consciousness, which brings equality and liberation, and the psychic being, which brings an intimate union with the Divine and opens the nature to the higher consciousness.

To find “Our Many Selves” online, go to [vimeo.com](https://vimeo.com) and type Lynda Lester in the search box.

**Two new mobile apps.** In Search of the Mother, an online organization related to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, has recently released two new mobile apps on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

1) **AuroDunia:** AuroDunia presents a compilation of gems from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This is the first mobile application in Hindi on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother containing their writings on Integral Yoga and various other aspects of spirituality in daily life, as well as videos and a collection of photographs.

Apple download link: <https://itunes.apple.com/in/app/aurodunia/id1193048439?mt=8>;

Android download link: go to <https://play.google.com/store> and search for: aurodunia.

2) **AuroMusic:** This MobApp aims to bring to the user an ocean of auditory bliss in the form of audio files including songs, recitations and readings related to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Presented in an easy to use layout, one could upload and share one's own compositions/music, connect with other artists, and upload one's favorite audio files including music, recitations, podcasts related to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through this App.

Android download link: go to <https://play.google.com/store> and search for: auromusic.



## *AV almanac*

### **Experiments in alternative education: The Learning Community**

by Manas Chakrabarti

*The following two articles are reprinted from Auroville Today, February 2017 issue. Here Manas discovers in Auroville the educational experiment he dreamed of years ago.*

**Y**ears ago, lying in a hammock at a research centre in the Andaman Islands, I remember dreaming of a school that would use place-based education to its fullest potential. In place-based education, children learn through immersion in the specific culture and context of their community. It was not an accident that the thought came to me on that lazy afternoon. Island biogeography is very special and leads to unique cultures, endemic species and unusual ecological systems. It was easy to see how a school could use the sense of place to ground children's learning in everything from science to history and from language to mathematics. That thought lay dormant for a long time till I came to another island—an island called Auroville.

Auroville is unique because of the extreme diversity that it supports within a very small area. It's the perfect place for place-based education and one school, if you can call it a school, is making this happen. Started in 2009, The Learning Community (TLC), uses the whole flow of life in Auroville as the context for learning. It dips into the experiences of the entire community and tries to build in children an integral sense of self.

Creating a deep connect with nature is one of the most important aspects of learning at TLC. The children visit a forest every week and spend time immersing themselves in nature. It's not that there's an ecology curriculum to follow—merely being in nature and observing the cycle of life gives deep insights. And in any case, it would be hard to design a class around a lizard laying eggs, something that some of the children observed recently in Pitchandikulam Forest.

Johnny's place in Fertile adds some more dimensions to their forest visit. There's carpentry, basket weaving and metal forging. And there are 'forts, dens and bush houses,' those special places for children.

The wilderness of the forests is balanced with the steady rhythm of the farms. The children have composted in Buddha Garden and raised chickens in Auro-Orchard. The rela-

tionship with Annapurna Farm is special. The cereals for the Friday open lunch come straight from the farm and the husk is used in the compost toilets. The children have even helped Annapurna conduct yogurt tasting for different strains of probiotics. Learning where our food comes from is critical and, if the thin attendance at the recent Farm Festival is anything to go by, we need a lot more of this awareness.

Once every term, children participate in Service Week, when they immerse themselves in the world of work. During Service Week, units such as Auroville Paper, PTDC, Shraddhanjali, Miniature and Naturellement become busy centers of learning. Mechanics is quite popular, with many children choosing to work with motorcycle maintenance.

Arts and aesthetics is an integral part of Auroville, and TLC has extensive connection with art centers such as White Peacock Clay Studio and Play of Painting. The children also visit Last School every week for art classes.

It's interesting to see that although TLC strongly believes in learning beyond the classroom, it does not reject classroom learning entirely. The older children attend English Language, English Literature and Biology classes in Last School. TLC has also started formal Math classes for some students.

TLC students spend several hours a week, sometimes up to ten hours, playing a variety of sports. Swimming has become quite popular. Every student must swim a minimum of two hours a week and many of them participate in competitive swimming.

A little bit of entrepreneurship is thrown into the mix as well. The students operate and manage Dewdrop Café, which sells lemonade and cakes. Open on Thursdays and Fridays from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm, the café is managed by the children. Currently, there are discussions underway on business planning and strategies for expansion! The children do everything—cooking, serving and cleaning up. Speaking of cleaning up, TLC is one of the few places in Auroville where you won't see ammas or other paid workers. Children and their parents take the responsibility for every kind of work.

Learning is not restricted to the physical boundaries of Auroville. Last year, a group of TLC children joined students from other Auroville schools to spend a month at the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamshala. There are field trips to Hampi and Panchgani. And at Varanashi Farms, the children combine wilderness experience with swimming practice. TLC considers Marudam Farm School in Tiruvannamalai as its sister school. Interestingly, when Marudam started it was called Tiruvannamalai Learning Centre, or TLC. Every year, students from Auroville's TLC immerse themselves in arts and crafts in the Craft Week at Marudam.





When TLC started eight years ago, the children and the parent-facilitators moved from location to location in Auroville. There was no focal point or a place to come back to. Now, TLC has Basecamp, a plot of land with a yard and three small buildings. The buildings are used for working on individual projects and for conducting some group classes. The children still move around Auroville for hands-on learning in the community, but they can come back to Basecamp. Also, building and managing their own community is itself an intensive learning experience for the children.

But there's a nagging feeling at the back of my mind. Is Basecamp the first innocuous step towards setting up a more formal school? As TLC grows and gains mass, will it be able to counter the increasing force of gravity that seems to affect most institutes of alternative education? Starting with great promise, these institutes often become victims of their own success. With increasing enrollment often there comes increasing parental pressure for formal, classroom learning. Soon, the attention shifts to tests and demonstrable outcomes.

I can only hope that the wonderful people of The Learning Community will have the courage to stay true to the original promise of the experiment.

## Experiments in alternative education: A new initiative in extended learning networks

by Manas Chakrabarti

In his 1971 educational classic, *Deschooling Society*, Ivan Illich described the idea of Learning Webs. These are informal learning networks that connect learners with available learning resources. Illich specifically referred to open directories of educational resources and professional educators. There were attempts in the early days to set up such a network in the community but they failed because neither the students nor the educators were ready. Now it looks like such a learning network is beginning to emerge again in Auroville, 'the place of an unending education'.

From piano to pottery, Auroville Youth Activities (AVYA) is providing a platform for educators to offer their knowledge and skills. The AVYA website currently lists 38 activities. More activities are being offered, but are in various stages of evaluation and use. The website itself is very comprehensive and has a simple design. Every activity has a description and practical information for potential participants.

About a third of AVYA's activities are performance or fine arts. These include dance, music, painting and pottery.

The range of activities is quite impressive, with dances such as Bharat Natyam, Odissi, Jazz, Bollywood and Tango being offered to children. Apart from these, AVYA offers several interesting sports activities. Some are popular teams sports, such as basketball and football, while others are more about inner balance, such as yoga, gymnastics and archery. Horse riding is offered in three different approaches. A range of martial arts training is offered, and includes aikido, nin-jutsu, capoeira, kick-boxing and mixed martial arts.

Although it started out as a platform for sports, AVYA clearly has moved beyond fixed categories of activities. This is perhaps a good idea, simply because some of the most interesting activities are hard to categorise. Is rhythmic gymnastics a performing art or a sport? What about Eluciole Circus? And hatha yoga is impossible to put inside a box.

Auroville Youth Activities seems to be quite popular—the programmes currently host more than 500 places for children. The ages of these children range up to 18 years. Most of the activities are designed for primary school and older children, with six activities suitable for children below six years of age. One of the most attractive aspects of AVYA is the opportunity for children to socialize across ages and different schools.

The activities run through the week, including some on Saturdays and Sundays. Most of the activities run between 4 pm and 8 pm. "Doesn't this make the day really long for school children?" I ask the members of the AVYA core team. They agree and say that AVYA is in discussion with Auroville schools to see if some of the activities can run as a part of the school day to make the timetable more flexible and child-centered. Changing the school timetable will, of course, be a challenge. A school has many moving parts and every school runs with a certain rhythm to keep the parts from falling apart.

The concentration of activities in the evening also leads to some challenges in managing venues. While a few of the activities, such as piano, are individual activities, most are large group activities. Often these activities need special flooring or equipment. Some venues are open to sharing among diverse activities, and others are quite specific about the kinds of activities they can accommodate. Often the challenge seems to be the noise generated by a bunch of children having a very good time.

AVYA is managed by a group of seven Aurovilians who are dreaming of a future in which learning is not confined within narrow institutional walls. There will be challenges, but AVYA is moving forward, primarily with the energy, of the children and families who appreciate the diversity of activities available.



## Salon

### The surging wave

by Seabury Gould

*The surging wave-throbs of her vast sea-heart [...]  
For the birth and death of the worlds they fixed a date,  
The diameter of infinity was drawn,  
Measured the distant arc of unseen heights  
And visualised the depths till all seemed known  
That in all time could be. [...]  
A new beginning flowers in word and laugh,  
—Sri Aurobindo (Savitri, pp. 270–275)*

I have been deeply thankful for the inspiring words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother throughout my adult life. I have had an insatiable appetite for inspirational quotes in general, but *Savitri* is like mantra, like oracle, like “surging wave throbs.” Reading his inspired words, I resonate with and trust completely in the “new beginning.”

When I have been enduring ordeals, I take to heart words of the Mother such as: “Be courageous and above all be sincere, with perfect honesty. Then you will be able to face all difficulties” and “Be grateful for all ordeals, they are the shortest way to the Divine.” I cherish how Sri Aurobindo reminds me that “A new ordeal always brings with it a new awakening.”

There is a deep-seated need in the human spirit to tell stories, to hear and share stories, and to drink deep of the wonder and the impact of the written word. Often the words of the Mother, in their relative simplicity, help me reconnect with Grace: “The Grace is always with you.” “The Grace is at work everywhere.”

Books of poetry by poets such as Sri Aurobindo, Rumi, Pablo Neruda and Yeats are books I keep going back to again and again. I cherish how someone like Neruda can so brilliantly speak of love:

Love, what a long way to arrive at a kiss..  
To think of the effort..  
to think that you and I, divided by trains and nations,  
we had only to love one another:  
with all the confusions..  
the earth that makes carnations rise, and makes them  
bloom!

I have always felt much respect for people in my life who are eloquent and “well-spoken.” I agree with these words of Tom Stoppard that “Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones, in the right order, you can nudge the world a little.”

I appreciate immensely the sharing of deep thoughts and profound feelings not only in conversations but also in personal written correspondence.

I have been intrigued by seeing how far Sri Aurobindo and certain other writers can go with words. An example of “juicy eloquence” is Joseph Campbell brilliantly expressing how certain stories or myths can waken “participation in the inscrutable mystery of being.”

Sometimes I am facing that which is ineffable. It feels life-giving when I encounter stories or song lyrics which awaken a sense of wonder and awe. When I am being a storyteller telling a story or a singer/musician singing a song, it is always meaningful to be expressing that wonder and enchantment.

In an original song that I wrote called “Weaving circles,” inspired by travel in the Yucatan, my intention is to express that sense of wonder:

...Surging fountain, clear blue waters, old woman  
weaving roots and circles,  
Jaguar watching ripening water, sweetness, sun and  
earth and sky...

It is a blessing to read a masterpiece of a sentence, such as “He had one foot in compulsory illusion and the other in secret reality” (Isabel Allende, from “Of Love and Shadows”).

There comes a point when I feel like there are apparently no words to describe the essence or the depths of a particular feeling.

I have also enjoyed how the written word can take me “inside” an aesthetic experience and into another world. In stories and in life, I open myself to seeing the equilibrium in the beginning of a story; how conflict or the element of trouble comes in; and how there is a climax and a Moment of Truth which brings a resolution to the conflict and through which the main character learns an important lesson. As the story ends, a new balance has been established and I know that everything has been resolved and settled. There is a feeling of completion and a new equilibrium.

As Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri* (p. 276):

*The timeless Ray descends into our hearts  
And we are rapt into eternity.*





## Surrender

by Kalyna Temertey-Canta

It was at 12 am that I awoke in a sickly state, having arrived four days prior to Pondicherry with the beginnings of a cold. This night it had progressed to what I would diagnose as Sinusitis. Having suffered through terrible winters with ear infections and the like, my mind went into panic mode. Swinging from “What should I do?!... I need a heavy blanket to sweat it out” to “how can I get ingredients for tulsi and ginger tea?” or “what homeopathic remedies have I packed?”, and most humorous of all, “how could I perform a steam towel treatment, standing upright in the guesthouse kitchen, at midnight?”

It was evident there was no viable choice, but to PRAY. To whom you might ask? The Divine feminine force of Creation, also known as the Mother, to the devotees of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. As one ashramite astutely explained, “By surrendering to the Mother, you are surrendering to your own higher self.”

Attending the collective meditation (samadhi) I have observed believers pressing their foreheads to the cold marble tomb, or unabashedly prostrating themselves before the full length portrait of the Mother. In life, I have heard stories, I have known people who have been cured by deep faith. Better yet, those who never fall ill due to their spiritual belief.

You may have guessed, it is not in my upbringing to demonstrate faith to God in any manner. Daughter of a proclaimed Atheist and a mother who prefers to use quantum theory to justify her spiritual experiences, I am a ship lost in the cosmos.

Nevertheless I heard in a distinctly feminine voice within, tell me to pray. And so it happened that I unrolled a straw mat and knelt before the photograph of a most admirable couple, that hung above the bamboo cot, and began cautiously, “I thank Divine Consciousness for all that you have granted me, thank you Mother for your wisdom and Love, thank you Sri Aurobindo for your knowledge and literary inspiration. I surrender this body to the Divine force. Please help me to heal.” Head pressed to the mat in subordination, and hands stretched out in gratitude. “Namaste.” Returning to bed and purposefully concentrating on the affected parts, I again surrendered all of my corps and fell into a profound sleep that lasted long into the morning.

\* \* \*

Writing on the same day after having performed consecutive prayers, including a full belly to the ground prostration. I am feeling remarkably better and know that the danger of Sinusitis has passed. In a book entitled *Health and Healing in Yoga*, that I happened upon at the library of Mother’s guesthouse, the Mother

writes, “you yourself, with your alleged conception, with your attitude and your acceptance of certain alleged principles, you yourself close the door upon the possibility of the miracle...” (*Health and Healing in Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1979, p. 60).

Without true faith we cannot surrender. Each day I ride a bicycle through the hazardous traffic of Pondicherry, I am taking a great leap of faith and often repeat to myself, “I am divinely protected.” Now it is time to extend this to other aspects of life!

(In Shallah, God willing ... and why would he not be?)





## Chronicles

### The First Nations and the soul of America

by Karen Mitchell

*May my words be tied in one  
With the great mountains,  
With the great rocks,  
With the great trees,  
In one with my body  
And my heart.  
May you all help me.*

—adaptation of a Yokuts prayer

#### Introduction

Integral Yoga invites us to work with and for our nation; but what did Sri Aurobindo and the Mother mean by “nation?” It is clear from how they lived and what they said, that for them, “nations” were not abstractions; they could not be reduced and confined to ideas, artifacts, symbols, economics, history, or anything else. For Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, nations are souls, are psychic beings:

The nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist. One may say even that, like the individual, it essentially is a soul rather than has one; it is a group soul that, once having attained a separate distinctness, must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life. The parallel is just at every turn because it is more



than a parallel: it is a real identity of nature.<sup>1</sup>

Just as each individual has a psychic being which is his true self and governs his destiny more or less overtly, so too each nation has a psychic being which is its true being and molds its destiny from behind the veil: it is the soul of the country, the national genius, the spirit of the people, the center of national aspiration, the fountainhead of all that is beautiful, noble, great, and generous in the life of the country.<sup>2</sup>

In the life of Sri Aurobindo we see an example of a human being awakening to and serving the psychic being of his country. I sensed this from my first introduction to him and Integral Yoga nearly ten years ago. Now, after many years of engaging with the soul of my own nation, this initial sense has become something so much wider, richer, and clearer. It has opened my eyes to the evolving relationship that existed between Sri Aurobindo and India and has allowed me to see how India played a crucial role in the coming forward of his psychic being. Their relationship, like all true relationships, was one of reciprocity. I see how certain experiences in Sri Aurobindo's life were not solely individual

experiences, but were experiences that co-arose within relation: the relation of his psychic being with the psychic being of India. I would like to give a couple of examples of this way of seeing things.

As soon as Sri Aurobindo returned to India as a young man, he later said that a great calmness had come over him. For many years, I heard this as reflecting the fact that living in a foreign land and culture is highly stressful and unsettling. Returning to India, Sri Aurobindo immediately felt freer to live and work as himself. Now I sense another possibility: that great calm he spoke of was also India's. The soul of India was becalmed as it recognized, welcomed and embraced Sri Aurobindo as someone through whom it could find a wide, deep, and integral manifestation and expression within Earth and the Cosmos.

Here is a second example. One day a friend or acquaintance of Sri Aurobindo suggested they go to the temple of Kali in the Chandod area. Sri Aurobindo was not enthused about this. Though he had been reading and appreciating India's sacred texts, his English education and modern sensibilities gave him the tendency to downplay or even view as “primitive” such a material expression of religion and culture. Though I feel he had low expectations going in, it seems as if he was completely surprised by what he experienced. It inspired his marvelous poem “The Stone Goddess”:

In a town of gods, housed in a  
little shrine,  
From sculptured limbs the God-  
head looked at me,—  
A living Presence deathless and  
divine,  
A Form that harboured all infinity.  
  
The great World-Mother and her  
mighty will



Inhabited the earth's abysmal  
sleep,  
Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,  
Mute in the desert and the sky  
and deep.

Now veiled with mind she dwells  
and speaks no word,  
Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,  
Hiding until our soul has seen,  
has heard  
The secret of her strange embodiment,

One in the worshipper and the  
immobile shape,  
A beauty and mystery flesh or  
stone can drape.<sup>3</sup>

When I first found out about this event and read the poem, I focused on the matter, the materiality of the stone, and saw in it one of Sri Aurobindo's foundational experiences of the Divine potentiality within matter. Now, I see within his experience an additional dimension. The stone had been worked, made into an image of Kali by human beings whose bodies and minds were instruments of the psychic being of India. Through the most material, the most "stony" expression of India's great culture, of her psychic being, Sri Aurobindo perceived the "World-Mother" looking at him. Through the seemingly least revealing gesture, the most veiled or opaque (to modern sensibilities) manifestations of India's psychic being, Sri Aurobindo saw the great World-Mother and Her mighty will. Was this World-Mother the psychic being of India? Was She the psychic being of Earth? Was She the Divine Mother? I do not know, but in holding all of these as possibilities, I feel the intimate connection and resonance that exists between the psychic beings of Sri Aurobindo, of India, of Earth, and all of

these with the Divine Mother.

Awakening to the psychic being of our own nation is of critical importance now. While many citizens who call themselves liberal and progressive have been moving very quickly into a more open, interconnected, and global world while largely leaving Nationhood behind, the more conservative and security-minded citizens have put the brakes on and demanded a return to national boundaries, national security, and a focusing on national concerns. One group is avoiding or neglecting the Nation, the other wrongly relating to it. Nationalism, which is the shadow of the nation, is on the rise here as it is in several other countries. "Making America great again," is often the collusion of our shadow with the shadow of the Nation. The activation of the shadow hides the psychic being of the Nation as it does ours, but I believe it also signals the presence of the psychic being and its desire for engagement. How can we face and see through the shadow and engage with the psychic being of our Nation?

Within the contemporary Integral Yoga community, I know of no better guides than Wolfgang J. Aurose (Schmidt-Reinecke) and Soleil Aurose (Lithman) for helping us through by giving us a context for current national events. Wolfgang's strength is his capacity to apply and elaborate on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's conceptualizations regarding the souls of Nations. Soleil adds a method for engaging with the psychic being of one's nation through one's own psychic being. Together, they have given Soul of the Nation workshops around the world. I have attended one of their workshops given at the Sri Aurobindo ashram in Lodi, California and discovered how profoundly and pervasively I have been affected by the soul of my country.

During the AUM conference in Lodi in 2013, Wolfgang gave a wonderful presentation on the Soul of the Nation.<sup>4</sup> Even if the reader has heard this presentation or a similar one given by Wolfgang in the past, it is worth listening to again. There were several key ideas in that presentation I would like to share here because this series of articles builds upon them.

The first is that a Nation is a mystery, an inexplicable bond between people. This sense of mystery can keep us from limiting and rigidifying what the nation is and means. The second important idea is that Integral Consciousness is able to give new meaning to Nations. Typically, spiritually focused individuals lack confidence in the role of Nations and do not see them as truth-bearing. This is due, at least in part to the fact that: "spirituality pre-dates nationality." Integral Consciousness sees Nations, with all their imperfections, as forwarding the evolution—the eventual manifestation of Divine Life on Earth.

A third very important idea is that Nations can be roughly characterized by type. There is the cultural-mythical Nation and the political Nation which is historically the much younger of the two and is based largely on reason. These can coexist in one land, but they represent two very different modalities of consciousness and are rarely integrated. I would add that these two modalities of consciousness have completely different and seemingly opposed "operating systems." The cultural-mythical is programmed for connection, for relation. The political is programmed for the freedom and development of individuals.

As we apply these ideas to America, we realize that there were many Nations here before European settlement. They were mostly of the cultural-mythical type, but as Wolfgang





pointed out, there were several First Nations, who were beginning to incorporate and integrate elements of the political. The Iroquois confederation of Nations, for example, inspired some of the ideas within America's founding documents. I sense in what Wolfgang says, a missed evolutionary opportunity—the possibility of an integration of consciousness leading to a complex unity of Nations within this land around the time of its founding. The failure to see and seize the opportunity in the early days of the American Nation was probably inevitable given the shocking and utter newness of the situation and the unpreparedness of human beings. After hundreds of years of terrible suffering and grief, I believe the opportunity is very slowly opening up again, and I also believe more people are prepared, or nearly prepared, to take hold of it.

Wolfgang thinks and senses that the First Nations have a significant role to play in the psychic being of America, and with that I am in whole-hearted agreement. He has laid out a conceptual framework within which I want to place both a more contemporary story of the rise of the First Nations in the soul of America, and a more personal narrative composed mostly of prose but also including poetry.

### I. Disappearance and return

*But in the Indian the spirit of the land is still vested; it will be until other men are able to divine and meet its rhythm. Men must be born and reborn to belong. Their bod-*

*ies must be formed of the dust of their forefathers' bones. —Standing Bear, Oglala<sup>5</sup>*

In the Fall of 2015, my husband and I visited and camped in Chaco Canyon in New Mexico. Chaco Canyon is a special place, a home and a large, complex ceremonial site for the ancestors of the Pueblo people. During a guided exploration of this remarkable place, a woman in our group asked with a great deal of emotion: "Why am I only learning about this now; why did I never hear about this before?" She spoke as if something vital to her soul had been withheld from her. This woman's question was the same one I had voiced at

on in the mission structure. Perhaps in other areas of the country and in other circumstances, more was widely known about the First Nations by my peers. I knew very little. In my mind the Indian belonged to the distant past and did not hold any special importance.

All of this changed in the late sixties with the occupation of Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay, by eighty-nine men and women from several different tribes. This event hit me like a revelation. The First People were still here. They were a Presence and their Presence radiated a special kind of power. They were real, multi-dimensional, and articulate human beings with just concerns and politi-

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cally inconvenient memories of historical agreements. Their near total absence from my memory, mind, and im-

agination, combined with the power with which they captured them, was experienced by my teen self as a huge shock. Emotionally and imaginatively, it was like the return of the gods.

Decades later, when I shared this experience with a close friend who grew up in a strict, conservative Christian household, she said she had a similar experience with Jewish people. She said it was difficult for her to admit it, but even as a young adult she assumed that Jewish people no longer existed. My friend ended up with a husband who converted to Judaism, and I ended up being profoundly changed by encounters with First Nation people—particularly the First Nation ancestors. Over time, I have come to see that these dramatic and highly emotionally charged responses are similar to responses within dreams

the Cohokia Indian Mounds across the Mississippi from St. Louis...

I grew up mostly in southern California and until the late sixties, I knew almost nothing about the First Nations of America, my main source of knowledge being the western films my family watched together. Until 1970, and the film: *Little Big Man*, the First People were portrayed mostly as either hostile savages or passive allies of white men. My other source of information about the Indians was the Catholic school I attended where I learned about the California mission system. This was depicted as an effective way to convert, educate and help the Indians. I learned nothing about the diversity, culture, language, history, experience or sense of the sacred among the indigenous peoples nor of course, about the cultural eradication and abuse that went

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and waking visions. I realize now they are communications of the soul. As communications of the soul, they are not reducible or restricted to personal import. They also have wider significance. Even at the time, I knew that my feelings towards the “returning” First Nations reflected their great significance to America.

I think more or less dramatically, this same experience has been shared by many people across this land. The “return” of the First Nations is an event, a happening within the soul of America, one that has quietly led to new imaginations and changes in American culture. These changes have been marked in newer films, films like the popular mainstream movie: *Dances with Wolves* (released in 1990). In this film, the First Nations were portrayed in a morally positive, god-like light and

most of the whites were brutal, callous, and savage. The main character, a white soldier played by Kevin Costner, progressively moves deeper into the world of the First Nations, becoming a fuller, more connected human being in the process. This mythical film depicted the First Nations as redeemers of dehumanized and militarized white America. It was as if the savior the whites thought they were bringing to the First Nations, was the First Nations. It struck a deep chord in many, and went on to win seven academy awards including best picture. It also won the Golden Globe award that year for best picture.

In 1992, another First Nation themed movie was released: *Thunderheart*. In this film, a young, mixed

blood, law-enforcement official from Washington is assigned a case on a reservation because of his Indian blood. The young man is far from proud of his heritage when he arrives, but as he relates to First Nation people who embrace their heritage and has visions of his First Nation ancestors, his sense of who he is, transforms. As he gets deeper into the case, his white cohort and the Native Americans who have distanced themselves from the traditional ways are perceived as thugs, as allowing or supporting the poisoning of the reservation water source due to uranium mining.

These two films reflect a sea change in America and perhaps did some-

live in their way—one that honors and fosters our relations with all beings. This appreciation and longing not infrequently takes the form of learning and engaging in First Nation ceremonies, the adoption of a greater simplicity in lifestyle, the awareness that we do not live in some abstract “environment,” but within a complex unity of conscious beings; and the seeking out of First Nation elders, shamans, and teachers for life wisdom and healing.

All throughout America now there are reminders of the historical presence and various cultures of the First Nations. The fantasy of European white people moving into an untamed, virginal wilderness is much

*Since the sixties, the number of protected, cultural sites have multiplied greatly. There are now hundreds of protected cultural sites; and in parks, originally designated as such for special landscape features or for the protection of wildlife, the presence of the First Nations in the area is now frequently remembered through artifact, art, and narrative.*

more difficult to maintain. In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt designated Mesa Verde a National Park. It was the first such park that existed pri-

marily to protect evidence of the culture of the First Nations—in this case the cliff dwellings of the ancestors of the Pueblo people. Since the sixties, the number of protected, cultural sites have multiplied greatly. There are now hundreds of protected cultural sites; and in parks, originally designated as such for special landscape features or for the protection of wildlife, the presence of the First Nations in the area is now frequently remembered through artifact, art, and narrative.

The First Nation’s relationship with the government bureaucracy over access and protection of these parks and historic places, which often contain sacred sites, has frequently been contentious. However, while conflict still arises, there is a noticeable effort



on the part of government employees and volunteers to be more inclusive of and sensitive to the people of the First Nations. My husband and I witnessed a small example of this recently when we were in Chaco Canyon. Chaco Canyon has been designated a National Historic Park and a UNESCO World Heritage Center. It was a major center of ancestral Pueblo culture between 850 AD and 1250 AD after which, for unknown reasons, the people migrated out of the area. I wrote a poem called "Spider Woman" inspired by this mysterious migration and a Pueblo woman's perspective on it.

The question has been asked,  
the same question hundreds of  
times:

"Why did the ancient ones leave  
Chaco Canyon?"

Hundreds of times Park Service  
people answered:  
Maybe the climate changed, got  
drier.  
Maybe the social and political  
structures  
became top-heavy and oppressive.

Then someone was inspired to ask  
a descendent of the ancient ones:  
"Why did your ancestors  
leave Chaco Canyon?"

She answered: "It was Spider-  
Woman

Who led us into the canyon,  
and it was She who led us out."  
Oh, to navigate in this way.  
To be still and wait  
and then move  
so quickly,  
so unencumbered  
across the threads  
that one does not get stuck,  
and neither does one's passing  
break a single thread.

In recent years, there has also been many more opportunities to connect with First Nation cultures through their revival of traditional arts. These traditional arts include boat making, basket weaving, wood carving, totem making, doll making, pottery design, oral storytelling, sacred dance, jewelry making etc. There are also many splendid examples of art that combine contemporary and traditional materials and themes in film,<sup>6</sup> books, new musical forms and compositions, poetry, painting, sculpture, etc. The examples of First Nation artistic creativity are astonishing.

I have been moved on several occasions by the art of the First Nations. I will share only two. In the foyer of the Natural History Museum in Anchorage in 2006, there were indigenous women engaged in the traditional art of doll-making. As I walked slowly past one set of dolls, I was surprised by how animate they were, as if they were about ready to move or speak. When I spoke to an older indigenous woman about how the dolls impressed me, she told me that doll making was an art practiced in her culture and was usually passed down generationally. She pointed out another, younger woman making a doll at a nearby table, and told me she was her daughter. She said she had grown up on an island off the coast of western Alaska and had learned English with a Texan drawl from a school teacher. This teacher stayed with her community as they seasonally followed the seals. She conjured through telling the story of her childhood, winter nights when she would be in bed along with the other children and how the elders would come in to tell them stories all of which contained a moral point or life lesson. I have one of the dolls of this indigenous woman in my home. She is perpetually weaving an intricate basket and is dressed in traditional summer dress. She reminds me how all things are alive.

She reminds me of a lovely interaction, laced with humor, and love for life.

My second example is the written work of Paula Underwood who is a descendent of an Oneida woman of the Turtle Clan, who was given responsibility for remembering the ancient learning. Paula is part of a lineage of oral historians. I have read two of her wonderful books: *Three Native American Learning Stories* and *The Walking People: A Native American Oral History*. These contain amazing treasures. What I was especially struck by was the intelligence and wisdom needed, evolved, and expressed by the First Nations in keeping harmonious and mutually helpful relations between each other in ever changing and difficult circumstances. They learned how to work with the same nature we all share, how to respond to all its manifestations in a way that would best protect and nurture connection, relation and harmony. This was their primary focus rather than the encouraging of individual satisfaction, although the latter was not entirely ignored and often occurred as a result. Paula's story telling opened up a whole other world of feeling and possibility.

Though First Nation people are rightfully concerned about ongoing cultural theft and the publicizing of stories, ceremonies, and sacred sites that they want to remain within their Nations, many are sharing more of their heritage, history, sensibility, and evolving cultures with us. The world of First Nation people is much more complex and layered than ours. They belong to First Nations and they belong to America. They are bi-National. The Nations they belong to coexist in the same land, but do not have an equal basis of power. They have arisen from different modalities of consciousness and have been at war. In their own persons and communities they face





such great challenges because they are part of the evolutionary “front.” They are the torch-bearers, however conscious they are now of that fact. Despite a history of such painful, oppressive, and destructive interactions, they are sharing much with us so we can help shoulder the work.

The growing significance of the First Nations within America has a wide-spread influence on how we live with our individual and collective past, how we relate to the present, and how we move into the future. It is not by accident that during the turbulent, corroding, and divisive American election process of 2016, the Lakota-Sioux of Standing Rock powerfully attracted our attention as they stood and fought to protect their water. Two thousand vets were willing to put their bodies on the line to support them. Five hundred clergy responded to a call through social media to participate in a Native ceremony of healing and support at Standing Rock. In an abalone shell, these clergy people burnt a copy of a 16th century document which basically gave permission to Christian explorers, armies, and settlers to occupy and rule lands inhabited by non-Christians. These clergy people were then saged by the First Nation elders. Others across the country participated in protests, ceremonies, and actions in a show of solidarity with the Lakota-Sioux. A new wind is blowing through our land...

### Standing Rock

The soul rattles, the heart thrums, the body whole vibrates with song. Hundreds stand for Earth as one in Dakota snow.

The First Nations are rising.  
They face armed police,  
rubber pellets, arrest.

They stand for Water  
with the strength of Stone.

The young rediscover the ancient paths,  
feel the power of the old ways,  
how Earth, Herself, moves beneath  
their feet,  
how She joins with the people  
and lifts them up.  
New lightness breathes  
in deep, cold sorrow.

The First Nations bear the Sacred Fire.  
They stand for Water.  
They stand for Air.  
They stand for Animals and Fish.  
They stand for Trees and Plants.  
They stand for a world of relation.  
They are true warriors.

The soul rattles,  
The heart thrums, the body whole  
vibrates with song.  
The First Nations are rising.  
Let us rise with them.

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## Are you still a Muslim? Memories of a happy Islam

by Zackaria Moursi

A few years ago, I received an unexpected call from my nephew then living with his parents in Cairo; I had been living outside Egypt for many years already. Last time I had seen him, he was a playful little boy. Receiving a call from him surprised me because he had never called before; but the real surprise came when he proceeded directly to ask me: “Uncle, are you still a Muslim!?”

In the pause that ensued, my intricate relationship with my folks in Egypt sped with lightning speed through my mind. I smiled at the thought that my early-teen nephew dared at last to ask me the question everyone back home wanted to know: “Why, at the age of sixty-six, had I left my birth-country, where I had been living in relative ease, to move for good to an ashram dedicated to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?” My family and friends had known for some time that I was translating the works of these great spiritual masters into Arabic, but translating was one thing and migrating to live in an ashram was quite another.

My spontaneous reply to my nephew ran something like: “Yes, I am still Muslim, but I am also Christian, Hindu and Buddhist and everything else that has in it a kernel of truth, goodness and beauty.” He kept silent, then hastily mumbled good-bye, and hung up. We have not talked with each other since.

Now that my nephew is slowly edging into manhood, and the falling autumn leaves are reminding me of the shortness of human life, I feel a growing urgency to share my Islam



experiences with whomever cares to know them. What I want to say is not meant for everyone though; it is meant only for those young and open in mind and heart.

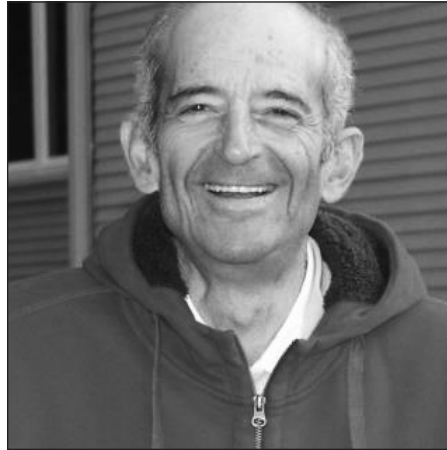
The reason I am sharing my experiences with Islam is that they represent a life story I can truthfully narrate and because I believe that, with some good will, we can always learn from true life stories, even when we do not agree with the message conveyed. But the strongest motivation for me to share is to express my concern for young Muslims who are currently living, in many countries, under extremely difficult circumstances and who have to witness how things are steadily worsening around them. It is no secret that lately Islam has lost much of the sympathy and esteem it once enjoyed worldwide, and that the opportunities for Islamic countries to reintegrate into the rest of the world seem to dwindle from year to year.

### **The happy Islam I have experienced**

I grew up in Egypt around the middle of the last century. The Islam I found was remarkably tolerant and appealing. Though personally I did not have a happy childhood, my difficulties had nothing to do with Islam (but rather with the particular mode of life in my parents' home). In fact, Islam was one of the sunniest aspects of my childhood, a fact I did not become aware of until much later.

Original Islam was marked by striking tolerance; it is enough to contemplate the following famous verses from the Quran:

Verily! Those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians and Mandaean\*, whoever believes in God and the Last Day



and performs righteous deeds shall have their reward from their Lord. They shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

My folks (and by "folks" I do not mean just first-degree relatives but the extended family with its large network of interrelated friends and acquaintances) practiced Islam in a remarkably uncomplicated way. Simply put, they were Muslims and happy about it; it would not have occurred to them they could be otherwise.

They did not care much for the juristic and theological divisions which have afflicted Islam over long stretches of its history. Strangely enough, the same divisions have come to the forefront in the consciousness of many Muslims today. My folks performed the prescribed religious duties freely: some prayed, others fasted, still others completed the pilgrimage, and a few completed all their religious obligations; they did not condemn or extoll others because of that. Youngsters in my family were free to practice on their own without censorship or pressure. The remarkable thing is that I saw no one misusing this freedom. My folks were, on the whole, decent, honest and hard-working, they loved their families and cared for the well-being of the people who worked for them.

Tensions between Muslims, Christians and Jews living in Egypt were almost unknown at that time. The presence of the British as the de facto rulers of the country welded Egyptians into a common national identity. A great majority of Egyptians hated the presence of the British; some actively resisted and fought against it and were detained in prisons or deported out of the country. National feelings did not make them averse to everything Western though. Many professionals sent their children to Western schools to make them multilingual. In these schools, Muslim and Christian children went to separate religion classes.

My parents did not talk religion with their children, and precisely their silent and unpretentious Islam had a lasting effect on me. I was deeply touched to see my father silently reading the Quran whenever he allowed himself some relaxed time at home, and I was similarly touched when I saw my mother, who suffered from chronic depression, cling to her Quran when she was in a crisis and pray fervently for relief.

Around my eighth year I developed a voracious appetite for reading, and I was specially fascinated by the popular booklets describing the glories and heroic deeds of the great figures of Islam. In the religion class at school, I got my first glimpses of the Quran. I could already then feel the power and beauty of its rhymed prose and appreciate the impact it must have had on the

\* The Mandaean follow a Gnostic religion the Prophet must have come across during his travels. There is no doubt in my mind that had the Prophet known the highly developed religions of the Far East [such as Taoism, Shintoism, Buddhism, Hinduism...] he would have included them in the verses above.



Arabs who heard it for the first time. In my early teens I developed the habit of visiting a nearby mosque where I enjoyed listening to recitations of the Quran. I was particularly attracted to those parts which describe the glory of God and the wonders and beauty of His creation and which call for compassion, brotherhood and equality of all people, and I was less interested in the later parts detailing the laws, prohibitions and punishments.

The members of my larger family dressed in a conservative European fashion; women were not veiled, elderly women and widows chose sometimes to cover their hair with a scarf. In large family gatherings, women and men were not strictly separated; if there was any separation, it came quite naturally because men liked to talk about their work and discuss politics, while women preferred to talk about children and domestic affairs. Men and women maintained a natural reserve; they often addressed each other using titles that varied according to rank, age, and degree of relationship. They naturally avoided showing too much familiarity or asking each other personal questions. Married and engaged couples avoided displaying their mutual tender affections towards each other in front of the rest of the family.

Talented young Egyptians were broadly educated, either in Egypt itself or in Europe; no wonder that some of them became the best thinkers and writers Egypt has produced in modern times. They interpreted Islamic civilization in biographies and novels which, in my view, have not been equaled to this day.

Having said all this, I would like to emphasize that it is by no means my intention to glorify the people among whom I grew up. I believe that the exceptional tolerance and openness they have evidenced resulted mainly from the fortunate circumstances they lived in. They, like most people, were mainly occupied with worldly matters and simply lived their Islam without thinking much about it. And yet, their example furnishes me with the point I want to make here, namely that the excessive and often violent religious zeal of the extremely conservative Muslims of today does not necessarily produce a bet-

remain: either to live in alienation and isolation or to be in constant conflict with everyone else. In the multicultural world of today, people do not really care about the religions of other people. Religion, or the lack of it, has become rather a private affair. On the other hand, people are welcome and sought everywhere as long as they are qualified, dependable, honest and socially agreeable.

### Aspirations for the future of Islam

1) I wish and hope that young Moslems would acquire the habit of learning from every occasion and thus go far beyond the school education they have received. In Egypt of the second half of the 20th Century,

*Islam, rightly understood and practiced, offers a healthy and resilient way of life that stands on the strength of its own truth. There is no compelling need for conservative Muslims to fear "contamination" by other traditions. Believers who are firm in their own religion should be able to live anywhere and everywhere without losing it.*

ter Islam, rather the opposite. Often these zealous people justify their extreme conservatism by the fear of losing their faith if they would relax in even the tiniest detail of the law. According to my experience and understanding, the people I have described in the previous paragraphs lived their Islam without coercion or fear and managed well in leading a happy and appealing version of Islamic life. Islam, rightly understood and practiced, offers a healthy and resilient way of life that stands on the strength of its own truth. There is no compelling need for conservative Muslims to fear "contamination" by other traditions. Believers who are firm in their own religion should be able to live anywhere and everywhere without losing it. The truly important thing today is to have enough fairness to grant other people the right to cherish their religions as well; otherwise only two alternatives

the quality of education, particularly in languages, has dropped far below what it was in the first half of the century. The neglect of foreign languages led to a narrowing of the horizon of many young people, and they consequently became dependent on the local media and happenings to form their views about life. Unfortunately, the media and the clergy have often bombarded young people with Islamic ideological and juristic issues that had been discussed, almost in the same manner, a thousand years ago. These young people were seldom taught that Islam is infinitely more than cut-and-dry legalistic doctrines. The result was that they know and care little about the glorious achievements of Islam in Bagdad, Isfahan and Cordoba and about the great Muslim philosophers, physicians, astronomers, architects and mathematicians whose works





were studied in European universities all through the Middle Ages. Lacking adequate background in philosophy, these young people find it difficult to grasp that the holy texts of Islam (or of any religion, for that matter) can be interpreted in a symbolic and psychological way that often reveals more of the truth contained in them than a strictly literal interpretation could ever reveal.

Most damaging, in my opinion, was the fact that young Muslims were seldom taught that their Prophet was, first and foremost, a messenger of peace and compassion who did all he could to avoid direct confrontation with his own people until he was forced, in the last years of his life, to defend his people and himself against their fierce and unrelenting assaults. One just needs to remember that as soon as

the Prophet finally entered victoriously into Mecca, he declared general amnesty and forgave all those who had been inflicting untold injury, humiliation and torture on his followers. One needs only to remember that the only mention of war in the Prophet's Last Sermon of Farewell, was an exhortation to his people to respect the traditional prohibition of war during the four holy months of every year. In the rest of the Sermon the Prophet urged his people to regard life and property as a sacred trust, to consider their wives a trust from Allah, to refrain from hurting others, to be honest and to fulfill their worldly and religious obligations.

Young Muslims were seldom taught that civil courage can be much greater than dying on the battlefield. The Prophet demonstrated his greatest courage when he dared, single-handedly at first, to confront his people with a

new religion that went against all their cherished pre-Islamic notions and values. When he asked proud tribal Arabs, for whom making war was the normal way of life, to be humble in front of Allah, the God of mercy and compassion in whose eyes they and their slaves were equal—his new religion must have appeared to them sheer madness and an unacceptable provocation.

Young Muslims today often ignore the fact that the Prophet, before developing into the phenomenal man of action he became in his last years, was for a long time a deeply spiritual and peaceful traveling merchant who carefully studied the world around him. In his free time, he spent many solitary

an irrational folly that has caused an incalculable damage to Islam.

Establishing such solid peace is not easy though, and it requires a sustained spiritual endeavor. The topic of spirituality is too wide and sensitive to be discussed here. The one particular thing I would like to say in this article is to mention the great contributions of the Sufis to world spirituality. Today Sufism is the most warmly accepted aspect of Islam worldwide. It is time for Muslims to re-evaluate their relationship to Sufism and to try to learn from it how to awaken in their hearts the Love of God and His creation which is a much more effective guide to keep humans on the right track than the fear of God's punishment.

This article is my answer to the question put to me by my nephew that I mention in the beginning of

*One just needs to remember that as soon as the Prophet finally entered victoriously into Mecca, he declared general amnesty and forgave all those who had been inflicting untold injury, humiliation and torture on his followers.*

nights contemplating on the top of a nearby mountain—thus preparing himself for the revelations he would receive and the great actions he would later perform. Today we witness some young Muslims, who have hardly any experience or knowledge, assume for themselves the right to change the world according to their own understanding and in violent ways that are totally un-Islamic.

2) I also wish and hope that Muslims would understand the simple equation that to live peacefully in the world, they need to begin by establishing peace in and among themselves, not a superficial peace that collapses by the first provocation, but a solid and lasting peace. Once this solid peace is established, the extreme violence committed in the name of Islam in the last decades would become unthinkable and would appear in its true light:

this article. May I end by adding one more detail which would complete my answer to his question: The reason I have left Egypt to spend my remaining years in an ashram dedicated to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is that I find this ashram to be, for me, the most suitable place, to deepen, in and around myself that solid peace I mentioned in the previous paragraph, the peace on which, in the long run, a divine life can be established on earth.

"If mankind could but see though in a glimpse of fleeting experience what infinite enjoyments, what perfect force, what luminous reaches of spontaneous knowledge, what wide calms of our being lie waiting for us in the tracts which our animal evolution has not conquered, they would leave all and never rest till they had gained these treasures." —Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 423).



## Essays

### Karma

by Martha Orton

#### I. Introduction

It is frequently believed that we human beings are punished for our mistakes and rewarded for our good deeds, this occurring through the vicissitudes we experience as our lives unfold. Whether we believe that this justice is meted out by a higher power we consider to be God, a power called Karma or Fate, or universal forces of some kind, we may feel at the mercy of some vast system of justice which overpowers our ability to manage our lives and fortunes. Indeed we are all too aware that we do not have control of our fortunes or our futures and not only because we recognize the ability of other people to influence circumstances and events. Our sense of justice in life, which for this discussion we will simply call Karma, can originate from several causes. This essay seeks to examine these and to consider them in the light of Sri Aurobindo's teaching.

Sources of our sense of Karma can be identified as: religious beliefs of right and wrong and the justice deserved; societal beliefs, including law and its sanctions; the human psychological composition, including the conscience and sense of obligation to others. We can also categorize these as external or internal in origin and essence. Those that are external are taught to us through our education in a specific religion or belief system and also through our education as members of the society in which we live and of which we are a part. Our internal



sense of justice is less readily identified and defined. It comes from our sense of responsibility to others, which derives from our innate knowledge of connectedness—connectedness with all that is around us, all sentient beings (other people, animals, plants), our environment, and the Divine which permeates and surrounds us, whether we recognize this reality or not.

Our inherent knowledge of connectedness is not always recognized consciously. It is deep within us as part of our humanity. In our daily lives we are necessarily aware of the emotional connection we have with those around us. We resonate with the commonalities we experience in our general humanness throughout our daily lives. This is true whether we care deeply for someone else or simply know them casually and do not hold a definite opinion of their value to us. In this way we have an undercurrent of obligation to treat others with a certain degree of consideration and respect. This is part of being human. Whether we uphold this concept and honor it in our attitudes and behavior or fail to do so, either response on our part has internal consequences for us. Depending on the sensitivity of our conscience, our internal self-monitoring

device, we will feel good, bad, or many shades in between, as a result of our treatment of others. This is probably our most directly observable example of personal Karma, created within and acting within ourselves as a result of our own sensitivity, attitudes and behavior. We thus reward ourselves with happiness or other feelings of satisfaction or punish ourselves with misery and feelings of guilt or disquiet.

Thus the familiar saying, "Virtue is its own reward," is played out in our inner response to our outer behavior. However, this statement is primarily interpreted to mean that we should not expect to be rewarded by others for our kind or altruistic actions. Furthermore, it implies that it is our intentions and the values that support them that matter most. This then relates to the spirit of our actions rather than the specific nature of their doings and results.

Our human pragmatic sense of justice, expressed in blunt and simplistic terms, wants to see good deeds rewarded and bad deeds punished. At the most elemental level, we feel this is the way things should be. We even have an ironic expression of scorn which can be used to dismiss intentionality and attribute value only to results: "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions." This is also used as an exaltation to prove good intentions by doing good acts, as in "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." So where does this leave us as regards Karma? Are we rewarded and punished according to our actions? Do our intentions and the values from which these derive matter in the karmic equation? Or is there even something larger going on than a running tally of the pluses and minuses that we can have attributed to all that we do throughout our lives? Sri Aurobindo has provided the answers to these questions.



## II. Reality

Sri Aurobindo examines Karma within the context of his explanation of reality. For, if there is such a thing as Karma, it necessarily exists and acts within the sphere of the reality of which we are a part. He asserts that even though reality far exceeds the range of our rational perceptions and ability to process these through the logic and reason of our intellect, the universe nevertheless consists of harmonious and meaningful forces and aspects. There is a loving and involved higher power who has created us, cares about us and does not subject us to completely random circumstances and forces. Sri Aurobindo explains that, if only this one material world existed, then we would have a very different situation as regards the meaning and purpose of our lives than we actually do. But because there are many planes of being and some of these exist beyond our physical world, we cannot be subjected to only the laws of matter. Instead everything is vastly more subtle and complex.

Human beings have been created as unique evolutionary beings, inhabiting the earth in order to manifest their evolutionary potential. We are not the complete fulfillment of the evolutionary progression, but simply the most evolved beings on earth up to this point. Sri Aurobindo relates our part in the evolution of creatures on earth to the material progression of the capabilities of the physical body and also to the capabilities of mind and consciousness. Our bodies and our consciousness can still be improved upon. As human beings we are necessarily well familiar with the imperfections of our bodies and also with the ways in which they may limit our actions and even eventually fail us. In view of the human limitations we ex-

perience, we can imagine having more capable bodies and better functioning minds. However, it may be difficult for us to conceive of having a higher level of consciousness. We may wish we were smarter, had better memories, could solve complex equations faster or learn new languages with greater ease, but these are processes of the intellect and not of consciousness itself as intended by Sri Aurobindo. Consciousness exists independently of the brain and the physical body. It participates in determining these and their character, but is not dependent on them. Consciousness is the essence of being, the very essence of all that is. As does everything, consciousness derives from the Divine, consists of the Divine and exists within the Divine.

As we manifest consciousness in our present human state, we express it in limited ways, while having the potential to realize and manifest consciousness much more fully. Sri Aurobindo explains this in his conceptualization of the evolution of consciousness, in which he describes the vast range of human potential which extends from the level of living in the material consciousness onwards to the higher ranges of mind and onward toward his conception of the Supramental. He describes how we have the potential to evolve and manifest higher and wider consciousness, growing ever closer to our origin in the Divine and, ultimately uniting with Him. This is possible, Sri Aurobindo explains, because the universe is an extension of the Divine Himself. He created it out of Himself and is therefore necessarily and literally involved in it, inherently within it. Sri Aurobindo describes this as the involution of the Divine in the manifestation and tells us that the involution not only enables the evolution but actually compels it, stating that the presence of the Divine in matter neces-

sarily must express and reveal Itself. In doing so, the revealed divinity transforms that in which it is inherently present. As human beings we are obviously part of this manifestation, with our physical being our most apparent component. Yet we have the spark of the Divine within us—the psychic being, the evolving soul—which will reveal itself as the individual's evolution progresses. We consist of many parts and planes of being, as Sri Aurobindo explains. In our discussion of Karma, we will consider the broad components—our surface being (physical, vital and to some extent mental aspects) belonging to Nature and primarily influenced by her forces and our inner being (soul, psychic being) belonging more fully to the Divine and directly under His influence.

## III. Nature and Karma

The forces of Nature, their action and their dominance of the material world are undeniable. We are well aware that conditions and actions at the physical level have their consequent results. Humidity builds and air pressure changes leading to a rain shower or thunderstorm. We are hungry and search for an opportunity to have something to eat. Someone brushes past us angrily, ignoring us, and we are perhaps angry or annoyed in response. We are kind to another person and can usually experience appreciation or kindness in return.

We are habituated to anticipating certain results of our actions. This is a necessary state of affairs in order for us to have the confidence and the will to act in our lives. We require a level of certainty in order not to be frozen with anxiety about facing the future, particularly insofar as we anticipate an approximate or specific range of time, or even a particular day. Hav-





ing a sense of probable conditions in the world around us and probable results of our actions enables us to make decisions and to act according to our personal judgment and will. This also ideally leads to a viable level of trust which enables us to function effectively in our lives.

In a larger context, we want to trust that if we work hard at our studies or at our jobs, we will be rewarded with appropriate degrees, monetary compensation or recognition of some kind. We also understand that if a fellow student or worker does not work hard at these tasks, this person may fail or be punished in some way. This fits our sense of justice and order. Hard work and virtuous behavior are rewarded, laziness or bad behavior are punished. Such expectations are part of the social order and what we conceive as the natural order of right and justice. We also take some satisfaction in this as certainty. In a sense this is an extrapolation from the order of Nature, in that actions have apparent and generally directly relatable consequences.

While we find that the relation between action and result very often works as expected in the short term and in readily observable situations, our sense of order and justice traditionally seeks to extend this relationship to longer term situations. For example, in the workplace it would seem quite logical to us for our hard work over a period of many years to result in a series of promotions and pay raises. In our personal lives, we want to be able to anticipate healthy children who live balanced and successful lives if we try our best to be supportive and loving parents. These would appear to be reasonable expectations. Yet observation and life experience reveal that none of these are consistently fulfilled hopes. Naturally there are other factors at play beyond our own individual

behavior. Even with understanding this, we tend to maintain the hope that our positive efforts will be rewarded with positive results, though perhaps not in a mathematically equal measure. In essence, we want to see virtuous actions rewarded and malignant actions punished. We feel that fits the laws of Nature, and our sense of right endorses this.

This tit for tat mathematical sense of justice in life is often considered to be the workings of Karma. When suffering occurs in life, there are those who believe it comes for just such a reason, as the justice meted out for some action or actions in the past that deserve punishment. Sri Aurobindo explains that this is not necessarily the case. He regards Nature as playing a part to some extent in meting out justice, but also explains that there is a greater Force which ultimately determines Karma, doing so not only for individuals, but also for groups and nations. Referring to the belief that “like creates like”, with good acts yielding good for the doer in return and evil acts returning evil results upon the doer, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Happily for the upward progress of the human soul, the rule breaks down in practice, the world-spirit having greater ends before it and a greater law to realise. The rule is true to a certain extent in tendency and works sometimes well enough and the prudential intelligence of man takes some account of it in action but it is not true all the way and all the time. It is evident enough that hatred, violence, injustice are likely to create an answering hatred, violence and injustice and that I can only indulge these propensities with impunity if I am sufficiently powerful to defy resistance or so long

as I am at once strong enough and prudent enough to provide against their natural reactions. It is true also that by doing good and kindness I create a certain goodwill in others and can rely under ordinary or favourable circumstances not so much on gratitude and return in kind as on their support and favour. But this good and this evil are both of them movements of the ego and on the mixed egoism of human nature there can be no safe or positive reliance. ... And there is worse; for justice, mercy, beneficence, kindness are often enough rewarded by their opposites and ill will an answer to goodwill is a brutally common experience. If something in the world and in man returns good for good and evil for evil, it as often returns evil for good and, with or without a conscious moral intention, good for evil. And even an unegoistic virtue or a divine good and love entering the world awakens hostile reactions. Attila and Jenghiz on the throne to the end, Christ on the cross and Socrates drinking his portion of hemlock are no very clear evidence for any optimistic notion of a law of moral return in the world of human nature. (*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vol 13, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, pp. 410-411)

Describing the effects of human actions in the wider sphere, beyond the life of the individual, Sri Aurobindo develops this explanation of actions and consequences further:

.... Actually in the cosmic dispensation evil comes out of good and good out of evil and there seems to be no exact correspond-



ence between the moral and the vital measures. All that we can say is that good done tends to increase the sum and total power of good in the world and the greater this grows the greater is likely to be the sum of human happiness and that evil done tends to increase the sum and total power of evil in the world and the greater this grows, the greater is likely to be the sum of human suffering and, eventually, man or nation doing evil has in some way to pay for it, but not often in any intelligibly graded or apportioned measure and not always in clearly translating terms of vital good fortune and ill fortune. (CWSA, Vol. 13, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, pp. 411-412)

Sri Aurobindo explains that our sense of mathematical justice in relation to the law of Karma derives from our identification with the outer life and nature, our physical and vital conditions. To the extent that we are identified with our physical and vital being and feel that this constitutes what we are, we see Karma in terms of our outer actions relating to consequences in the physical and vital aspects of our existence. The clearest example is the extent to which we are bound to the physical and vital laws of Nature. For instance, if we consistently overeat, we are likely to become overweight—a direct example of a physical law of Nature. If we are emotionally attached to a place or person and become deprived of that connection, we may grieve or be angry—a direct example of a vital law of Nature. However, Sri Aurobindo writes:

But all is not Law and Process, there is also Being and Consciousness; there is not only a machinery but a Spirit in things,

not only Nature and law of cosmos but a cosmic Spirit, not only a process of mind and life and body but a soul in the natural creature. If it were not so, there could be no rebirth of a soul and no field for a law of Karma. But if the fundamental truth of our being is spiritual and not mechanical, it must be ourself, our soul that fundamentally determines its own evolution, and the law of Karma can only be one of the processes it uses for that purpose: our Spirit, our Self must be greater than its Karma. (CWSA, Vol. 22, *The Life Divine*, p. 839)

As Sri Aurobindo powerfully and vividly explains through all expression of his philosophy and view of reality, the physical body and its associated vital, emotional nature are not all that we are. We are also mental beings with higher aspirations than those which relate to fulfilling our physical and vital needs and wants. This is so because we are even more than mental beings; most essentially, we are spiritual beings.

Our mental being informs and enriches us with knowledge that there is much more to be sought than physical and vital fulfillment. It aspires for knowledge, for truth, and ultimately for the only real knowledge—that of spiritual realization. This mental being is the outer agent of the soul within and its instrument in the manifestation to facilitate our advance in the evolution of consciousness. As we move from the physical and vital life toward the more mentally driven and spiritually influenced life, we experience a decreasing influence of the laws of Nature, including what Sri Aurobindo describes as the natural lines of Karma. In this process we experience an increasing influence of higher forces and our lives and futures are increasingly governed

by what Sri Aurobindo terms the higher lines of Karma. These originate in and are aligned with the higher forces which enable our progress in the evolution of consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo has explained that the Divine is not vengeful and does not relate to us according to our various formulations of human justice. He does not reward us, nor does He punish us, for our actions. We may experience a sense of elevation, feelings of being blessed by Grace, when we have acted according to our higher values, and that is Grace indeed. Our efforts and striving to do well, or to do good in life, in any higher manner, including spiritual aspiration or altruism, may bring results of which we are aware and which bring us happiness in and of themselves. We derive some degree of satisfaction and happiness simply in knowing that we are attempting to fulfill our higher values through our actions. This in itself is a reward. Yet, it is only truly so to the extent this movement within us is free of egoism, if we are not actively, consciously seeking to be rewarded for what we might consider our virtuousness.

However, the truly important point which Sri Aurobindo makes with regard to the higher lines of Karma, and which he actually extends to Karma in general, is that its real purpose is to facilitate our evolutionary advance. As noted in his statement quoted previously, “Happily for the upward progress of the human soul, the rule breaks down in practice, the world-spirit having greater ends before it and a greater law to realise.” (CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 410) It is actually a very simple and direct concept, yet extraordinarily profound. He says essentially that the only Karma which follows us from life to life is that which is needed to aid the development of the soul in the evolutionary advance. The soul can actually



choose what Karma will help it and keeps this as part of its challenge for the next life. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The soul gathers the essential element of its experiences in life and makes that its basis of growth in the evolution; when it returns to birth it takes up with its mental, vital, physical sheaths so much of its Karma as is useful to it in the new life for farther experience. (CWSA, Vol. 28, *Letters on Yoga I*, p. 535)

How wonderfully loving the Divine is to arrange everything in such a way for us. We have the shocks and stresses given to us that we need to learn and grow, to develop our lower nature into its higher and divine counterpart. We also have tastes of the beauty, love and fulfillment of the Divine to enrich and elevate our lives, aiding us in rising above our human nature to divine nature. All this is given to us according to our need—all the pain and anguish, all the joy and beauty, all the suffering and bounty of our mortal existence are designed for our ultimate fulfillment, for the evolution of consciousness and the fulfillment of our purpose on earth.

#### IV. Our purpose

To consider Karma more fully, we need to examine Sri Aurobindo's conceptualization of the human purpose. The Vedas tell us that the Divine created the world and all its creatures for His delight. This is also spoken of as the Divine play or Lila, in Sanskrit. Sri Aurobindo describes this view:

If we look at World-Existence... in its relation to the self-delight of eternally existent being, we may regard, describe and realize it as Lila, the play, the child's joy, the poet's joy, the actor's joy, the mechanic's joy of the Soul of things eternally young, perpetually inexhaustible, creating and re-creating Himself in Himself for the sheer bliss of that self-creation, of that self-representation, —Himself the play, Himself the player, Himself the playground. (CWSA, Vol. 21, *The Life Divine*, p. 111)

Since the Divine is infinite and has limitless capacities for expression,

*He says essentially that the only Karma which follows us from life to life is that which is needed to aid the development of the soul in the evolutionary advance. The soul can actually choose what Karma will help it and keeps this as part of its challenge for the next life.*

one form of His expression was to create our universe, our world, and all the forms of life and matter within it. However, the creation was not made only for His amusement, though that in itself could be sufficient, but has a profoundly meaningful purpose. Most interpretations of the Vedas see this purpose in terms of human beings coming to the understanding that they can seek enlightenment and ultimately become absorbed into the Absolute, becoming freed from life on earth, including the chain of life, death and rebirth, according to the belief in reincarnation. Therefore a traditional view of mankind's purpose is to discover and unite with the Divine, ultimately being reabsorbed into the Absolute, essentially returning to the divine Origin.

Sri Aurobindo concurs with the perspective that the human purpose is spiritual development and realization, with the goal being to discover and unite with the Divine. We see this clearly in his description of the role of Karma in the development of the soul through the process of rebirth:

All the secret of the circumstances of rebirth centres around the one capital need of the soul, the need of growth, the need of experience; that governs the line of its evolution and all the rest is accessory. Cosmic existence is not a vast administrative system of universal justice with a cosmic Law of recompense and retribution as its

machinery or a divine Legislator and Judge at its centre. It is seen by us first as a great automatic movement of energy of

Nature, and in it emerges a self-developing movement of consciousness, a movement therefore of Spirit working out its own being in the motion of energy of Nature. In this motion takes place the cycle of rebirth, and in that cycle the soul, the psychic being, prepares for itself,—or the Divine Wisdom or the cosmic Consciousness-Force prepares for it and through its action,—whatever is needed for the next step in its evolution, the next formation of personality, the coming nexus of necessary experiences constantly provided and organised out of the continuous flux of past, present and future energies for each new birth, for each new step of the spirit backward or forward





or else still in a circle, but always a step in the growth of the being towards its destined self-unfolding in Nature. (CWSA, Vol. 22, *The Life Divine*, p. 847)

The evolution of the soul to which Sri Aurobindo alludes in this statement takes this process significantly further than previous spiritual thought has envisioned. Based on his comprehensive view of Brahman, Sri Aurobindo sees the involution of the Divine in matter as impelling a comprehensive evolution of mind, life and matter. Calling this the evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo envisions a complete transformation of mind, life and matter from their original expression in the creation to the realization of their full divine potential. This is a gradual evolutionary process in which consciousness and even matter reveal their inner divinity. The involution of the Divine in the manifestation not only enables, but actually makes inevitable, its ultimate evolution. The fulfillment of this process comes about through the union of the individual being with the Divine. While this initially resonates as similar to the traditional interpretation of the Vedic view, Sri Aurobindo does not see the goal as the absorption of the individual consciousness back into the Absolute from which it originated. Instead he envisions the divinized individual being transformed into its divine expression and continuing to live in the world and, by its influence, facilitating the continued evolution. This is not only an individual process, but also a generalized one in which life on earth

can ultimately become completely transformed.

## V. Conclusion

Consequently reward and punishment meted out as pleasant or painful life events and circumstances, as we generally regard these in human terms of what comprises life in the world, become irrelevant in relation to our purpose in life and the meaning of our existence. Whatever is most efficacious for our real inner development, our growth and progress in the evolution of

*It does not serve His purpose to reward the virtuous with wealth or success in human terms or even to punish the malevolent with pain and suffering. In fact, either can be given according to what advances the development of the inner being, and these gifts and blessings can be completely unfathomable to the outer human mind and consciousness.*

consciousness, is the Divine's intention for us. It does not serve His purpose to reward the virtuous with wealth or success in human terms or even to punish the malevolent with pain and suffering. In fact, either can be given according to what advances the development of the inner being, and these gifts and blessings can be completely unfathomable to the outer human mind and consciousness. In this way, Sri Aurobindo asserts a key role for Karma in fulfilling human destiny. In Sri Aurobindo's conception of Karma, we see it not at all as a force to fear, but rather as dynamically positive and essentially an instrument and blessing of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo describes this:

Obviously we must leave far behind us the current theory of Karma and its shallow attempt

to justify the ways of the Cosmic Spirit by forcing on them a crude identity with the summary notions of law and justice, the crude and often savagely primitive methods of reward and punishment, lure and deterrent dear to the surface human mind. There is here a more authentic and spiritual truth at the base of Nature's action and a far less mechanically calculable movement. Here is no rigid and narrow ethical law bound down to a petty human significance, no teaching of a

child soul by a mixed system of blows and lollipops, no unprofitable wheel of a brutal cosmic justice automatically moved in the traces of man's ignorant judgments and

earthly desires and instincts. Life and rebirth do not follow these artificial constructions, but a movement spiritual and intimate to the deepest intention of Nature. A cosmic Will and Wisdom observant of the ascending march of the soul's consciousness and experience as it emerges out of subconscious Matter and climbs to its own luminous divinity fixes the norm and constantly enlarges the lines of the law—or, let us say, since law is a too mechanical conception,—the truth of Karma .... Let us then call Karma no longer a Law, but rather the many-sided dynamic truth of all action and life, the organic movement here of the Infinite. (CWSA, Vol. 13, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, pp. 427–428)



## A short course in Integral Yoga: 1. Basic processes

by Matthias Pommerening

*The following essay is based on the author's answers to study questions in an online course on Integral Yoga offered by the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research. The answers pertained to readings in Sri Aurobindo's Letters on Yoga II, in the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA), Vol. 29, pp. 121–294. Part 1 focuses on basic principles and processes of the Yoga, whereas Part 2 focuses specifically on Karma Yoga. Part 2 will appear in the next issue of Collaboration.*



### The object of sadhana

Sri Aurobindo summarizes the object of the Integral Yoga as follows: “The object of the sadhana is opening of the consciousness to the Divine and the change of the nature” (p. 208). He further writes, “It is a path of self-offering of the whole being in all its parts, the offering of the thinking mind and the heart, the will and actions, the inner and the outer instruments so that one may arrive at the experience of the Divine, the Presence within, the psychic and spiritual change” (CWSA, Vol. 29, p. 214). Through this process, the divine Shakti can become an active force in the being, bringing in higher and higher divine forces, changing even the ignorant outer nature and finally transforming the physical and material consciousness through the Supramental Force. Sri Aurobindo formulates the inner resolve necessary to reach this goal as follows: “The Divine has promised himself to me if I cleave to him always; that I will never cease to do whatever may come” (p. 213).

### Four processes in the sadhana of the Integral Yoga

Sri Aurobindo describes four processes involved in the sadhana of the Integral Yoga in the following quote: “As the Force works, it brings in the different processes that are necessary for the sadhak, processes of knowledge, of bhakti, of spiritualized action, of transformation of the nature” (p. 208). These processes are related to Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, and the Yoga of Self-Perfection. In the ideal progress of the Integral Yoga, these processes only begin with personal effort, and are gradually taken up by the Yoga-Force and the Divine Mother through the surrender of the disciple.

The four processes are related to the three traditional methods of sadhana: tapasya, aradhana, and dhyana. Tapasya means a conscious enduring choice and thereby focus of the will power on the aim of the Integral Yoga.

Aradhana is the Sanskrit term for the personal relation with the Divine through aspiration, bhakti and surrender and the specific expressions these take, for example repeating a mantra in adoration of the Divine. Dhyana refers to meditation and inner concentration of the consciousness.

These three methods should be combined with an aspiration for the perfection of the being and the change of one's nature through the Divine Forces working in all aspects of the sadhak's being and life. None of these yoga paths are mutually exclusive but supplement each other as vehicles of the Divine Force changing the sadhak in all parts of his being. In the choice of the most suitable method for the sadhak, there has to be a great plasticity and receptivity to the working of the Divine and Yoga-Forces. The aim of the Integral Yoga is an integral change of the entire nature. Therefore, all four processes come into play in some way during the process of transformation. Still a specific, easiest and most efficient “point of entry” might be chosen by each sadhak and the Divine guiding him or her.

Although meditation, bhakti, and the yoga of works can all be entries into the Integral Yoga and lead to each other and the respective realisations, Karma Yoga is the one indispensable process. It allows for the greatest influence of the Divine Force on the outer nature, thereby aiding the fourth process of Self-Perfection, including that of the outer nature. One way this can be achieved is to separate the pure consciousness of the Purusha from its entanglement and identification with the outer nature, Prakriti. From the station of this free center of consciousness, it is possible to offer up the Prakriti (outer nature) to the Divine for transformation. This can be applied in the yoga of works, in



which the silent Purusha behind the action offers up Prakriti for transformation. The yoga of works could also be approached from the position of the outer consciousness. In this case, instead of doing work for oneself, one consecrates and dedicates it to the Divine. This can lead to the experience of feeling the Divine Force doing the work.

Sri Aurobindo lays down the process of work done in the spirit of Karma Yoga, leading to bhakti and spiritual knowledge, in an impressive clarity and power in the following paragraph:

Works done in this spirit are quite as effective as bhakti or contemplation. One gets by the rejection of desire, rajas and ego a quietude and purity into which the Peace ineffable can descend;

one gets by the dedication of one's will to the Divine, by the merging of one's will in the Divine Will the death of ego and the enlarging into the cosmic consciousness or else the uplifting into what is above the cosmic; one experiences the separation of Purusha from Prakriti and is liberated from the shackles of the outer nature; one becomes aware of one's inner being and feels the outer as an instrument; one feels the universal Force doing one's works and the Self or Purusha watching or witness but free; one feels all one's works taken from one and done by the universal or the supreme Mother or by the Divine Power controlling and acting from behind the heart. By

constant reference of all one's will and works to the Divine, love and adoration grow, the psychic being comes forward. By the reference to the Power above we can come to feel it above and its descent and the opening to an increasing consciousness and knowledge. Finally works, bhakti and knowledge join together and self-perfection becomes possible—what we call the transformation of nature (p. 217).

Yet a different possibility of progress is the opening of the consciousness “in the head” to the states and Divine Forces above it, which, through a silent mind, bring peace into the entire being. This process seems to describe

*These three yogas need to be done “from within,” that is, with the consciousness centered in a Purusha, in contact with the psychic being, feeling the Mother's presence within, etc.*

the Integral Yoga starting off through the practice of Jnana Yoga. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

The sadhana of inner concentration consists in:

(1) Fixing the consciousness in the heart and concentrating there on the idea, image or name of the Divine Mother, whichever comes easiest to you.

(2) A gradual and progressive quieting of the mind by this concentration in the heart.

(3) An aspiration for the Mother's presence in the heart and the control by her of mind, life and action (p. 225).

Furthermore, Sri Aurobindo mentions “love, bhakti, surrender, the

psychic opening” as the fastest way to the Divine (p. 212). Here the first means of the Integral Yoga would be the movements of the psychic being, devotion and surrender to the Divine Mother and the removal of the ego. Sri Aurobindo mentions “constant pure devotion” and “removal of the ego” as psychic movements that enable surrender (p. 210). “Constant pure devotion” could also relate to the differentiation between the psychic bhakti and the bhakti of the outer vital nature. The latter is similar to love in human relations, in that it oscillates between ecstatic joy of union and despair of separation. The psychic growth brings with it “the increase in bhakti, psychic clarity of vision with regard to one's inner movements and the will to get rid of the vital ego, [as well as] increase in pure self-giving” (p. 211).

These three yogas need to be done “from within,” that is, with

the consciousness centered in a Purusha, in contact with the psychic being, feeling the Mother's presence within, etc. In Karma Yoga, one should not “externalize” one's consciousness in the activity, lose the inner contact through the activity of the outer mental, vital and physical nature. Then it would not be Karma Yoga but just work in the ordinary sense. Similarly, Jnana Yoga requires one to disengage with thoughts, feelings and sensations of the outer nature, to go within or above. Otherwise one just sits outwardly silent, thinking about something, being identified with a feeling, nourishing it, or occupied with some physical part of the being. In that case it would not be meditation, but the usual identification with the outer being. Bhakti Yoga differentiates itself





from outer forms of religious rituals like mechanical recitation of divine names, doing Pranam out of a feeling of obligation, cultural custom or habit, etc. through the connection with the psychic being. This connection naturally brings with it a deeper movement of adoration, worship and surrender to the Divine. Without it, the outer forms of worship used as examples would be hollow.

All these processes represent preparations for the descent and action of the Supramental Truth, which is “not bound by any method or rule” (p. 210). Generally, the Supermind seems to matter in the later stages of the sadhana and does not need to concern the sadhak in the beginning.

In all approaches, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes, the sadhak has to guard against the spiritual ego developing in him or her. For example, in Karma Yoga the ego

could proclaim what a great instrument it is to the Divine Mother, what great works the Divine Mother does through it, which would defeat the purpose of the intended process. The example of the consecrated activity of writing poetry is given, which can “keep one in contact with one’s inner being and that can help to prepare for the contact with the inmost” (p. 212), but could also lead to a big writer’s ego. A bhakti-ego might say that it has the greatest love for the Divine Mother, or a Jnana Yogi might be proud of his or her spiritual insights and realizations. Generally, one should not concern oneself with others’ processes: “how to do it faithfully oneself is the one thing important” (p. 214). Together with the four processes just discussed, other necessary qualities and abilities

mentioned are: aspiration, rejection, surrender, faith, the purification of the being, sincerity, and perseverance.

Depending on the sadhak’s character and general disposition of consciousness relating to the Integral Yoga, one of the three Yogas might be easier in the beginning. Generally, it is possible to balance all three of them. In his letters, Sri Aurobindo suggested specific proportions of the different types of yoga during the day, according to the individual’s temperament. For example, half an hour of meditation in the morning, work during the day and an attitude of bhakti welling up from the psychic being naturally at other times. Sri Aurobindo recommends other focus areas depending

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on the character. For Ashramites with an “expansive creative vital” he recommends an emphasis on consecrated work in inner concentration (p. 222). If there is an excessive drive to work and to exert oneself too much, so that the inner concentration is lost, short meditations to reestablish the connection might be helpful. Very few can rely solely on meditation, when “it is in their nature or if they have an intense and unshakable faith and bhakti,” but these seem to be rare cases (p. 223). General statements about the appropriate methods and means for somebody else’s progress in the Integral Yoga are difficult to make and one should refrain from making them. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Each sadhak must be left to

himself and the Mother to find his right way which need not be that of his neighbour. There is in the Ashram too much observation of each other by the sadhaks, criticism, discussion of persons, even baseless gossip about each other’s character, ideas, sadhana, actions along sometimes with theories and (usually mistaken) advice. All that is not very consistent with the atmosphere of Yoga. People should keep all their energy for their own sadhana—unless of course they are commissioned by the Mother to speak or state anything about the Yoga (p. 223).

### **The Divine Grace: its role in the Integral Yoga**

The Divine Grace is an omnipresent, benevolent force able to

provide help beyond the normally binding laws of manifested existence, although it is hidden to the physical sense and intellect. It is “[a] Grace that intervenes, the law of a supernormal Light and Will, a help, an opening from above” (p. 168). It is neither a glorified, divine reason, as human thought might abstract it from its own, nor a general divine compassion acting equally on everyone. The Divine Grace has its own higher discrimination and vision that determine its actions. Unbound by cosmic law and karma, it “acts more incalculably but also more irresistibly than the others” (p. 169) “in its own ‘mysterious’ way” (p. 170), often without the sadhak’s experience or understanding behind the veil. The Divine Grace can be understood as a power, stronger than spirit-



ual strength and even sincerity, able to protect, guide and hasten the sadhana of Integral Yoga, if it so wills, and to the degree that the sadhak opens to it.

To seek a relation with the Divine Grace is not indispensable for Yoga, as it is connected to the impersonal Self above or the Soul within and seeking experiences of other aspects of the divine only and finally having them might bring the Divine Grace with it. These spiritual realizations and their actions can't be separated too rigorously by the mind. In general, it is true for them what is true for the Divine Grace: "This understanding is not to be gained by reasoning nor by tapasya nor by much learning, but whom this Self chooses, to him it reveals its own body" (pp. 169–170). This illustrates that the Divine Grace reveals itself or acts upon the seeker by its own wisdom, often independent of the outer nature's actions, working for the growth of the psychic being. Still, in the larger context of Integral Yoga, personal effort is needed.

About the contribution of the sadhak, Sri Aurobindo writes that one should make oneself ready, give "the full assent" in order for the "full Grace" to manifest, which can "do everything" (p. 171). He or she should open inwardly, let the inner consciousness come in front. Sri Aurobindo states, that "some call, aspiration, intensity of the psychic being can awaken [the Divine Grace]" (p. 170), but he still emphasizes its general independence. Generally, Sri Aurobindo recommends a balance between the basic inner movements of the sadhana of Integral Yoga, requiring the personal effort of the sadhak in the form of cultivating sincerity, perseverance, aspiration and rejection on the one hand, and the trust and surrender to the Divine (Grace) on the other hand. One should put oneself into an inner state

that recognizes the touch, the pressure, the "still small voice" or Presence of the Divine (p. 175). The conscious experience of the Divine Grace does not impose itself usually, but comes under the condition of an inviting inner atmosphere of consciousness. Also, there shouldn't be a demand for the grace in the attitude of the sadhak, but the patient preparation of the being through tapasya to receive and keep the Divine Grace once it comes.

The unpredictability of the Divine Grace and the notion that one should not insist on it, do not mean to serve the lower parts and their tendency to find excuses not to aspire and collaborate in the work. The degree to which one can open to the Divine Grace relates to its ability to act (still on its own accord) and to the degree to which one closes oneself, turns away from it, it is less able to act in its full intensity (but never overruled in its own intention and ability to intervene). In principle, its abilities to intervene are limitless at any time independent on the sadhak's state, in practicality (generally, their might be exceptions, because the Divine Grace is beyond any kind of cosmic law) the full experience and intensity of the Divine Grace calls for the conscious collaboration of the sadhak. It seems as if the personal effort is especially needed in relation to the Divine Grace in the context of Integral Yoga (maybe less so in other Yogas or ordinary life), as its aim includes the manifestation of the "full Grace" in its full intensity, to make the individual a conscious instrument of its will. Sri Aurobindo explains,

The Divine Grace and power can do everything, but with the full assent of the sadhak. To learn to give that full assent is the whole meaning of the sadhana. It may take time either because of ideas

in the mind, desires in the vital or inertia in the physical consciousness, but these things have to be and can be removed with the aid or by calling in the action of the Divine Force (p. 171).

## The Divine Force

The Divine Force is invisible to the physical mind but is tangible, concrete and brings results. The possibilities of the Divine Force are infinite in principle. The "[...] Power within could alter the mind, develop its powers, add new ones, bring in new ranges of knowledge, master the vital movements, change the character, influence men and things, control the conditions and functions of the body, work as a concrete dynamic Force on other forces, modify events, etc. etc. [...]" (p. 181). For example, it can cure physical illnesses. If a disciple asks his Guru for help, the Divine Force works through him, through the intervening field of the Guru-disciple relationship and its instruments. In other circumstances the Divine Force might use a medical doctor, guide his thoughts and actions, to achieve the intended healing. In practice, the Divine Force is dependent on openness, faith, the call for it, and the degree to which adverse forces are working in the same field with opposing intentions.

The Divine Force and its workings are subjected to conditions and limitations, unless it is a supramental Force, which would bring the "Law of the Truth" (p. 182). For everything coming from "below" the supramental, the Divine Force is subject to the laws of the nature on the level of its intended effect. The lower in the hierarchy of the planes of consciousness where (a) the Divine Force originates or (b) intends to affect something, the less effective it becomes. For example, Over-



mind Force would have a greater effect on the mind, while the higher mind's effect on the subconscious would be comparatively less powerful. Generally, the effect of the Divine Force depends on the potential recipient's "will, receptivity, assent, self-opening and surrender" (p. 182).

To allow for the Divine Force to work within oneself, one needs to get in contact with it, keep it, open to it exclusively ("to put yourself on its side"), have faith and trust in it, call it quietly and let it do its work. By passivity to the force Sri Aurobindo means an exclusive passivity to its working, which therefore includes an active rejection of all lower or adverse forces. In a sense, this allows for the "space" in the consciousness of the sadhak to be filled by the Divine Force instead of other influences. If one could center oneself in a deeper part of oneself, like

an observer consciousness, a Purusha or the psychic being, it would be easier to keep the connection and allow the Divine Force to work. Identified with the outer mind or vital, one easily loses the connection while following ego-motivated energies. But once one gets in contact with it and allows its work to start, one should not be disconcerted if one gets lost again in the outer ego-consciousness, but aspire for the contact to become a conscious one again, have trust and faith in it to return, that it is actually working behind the veil in the subliminal. In an ideal state without ego, the Divine Force could work much more easily, one would feel it constantly, because the ego's allegiance with and call to lower forces cannot interfere anymore.

There are three stages of becoming conscious of the working of the

Force. In the first stage one makes first contact with the Divine Force. For example, this could be an experience in meditation in which one feels the Divine Force working on oneself. In this stage the awareness of its working recedes again, until it is perceived in another more conscious moment. In the second stage one is at least remotely aware of the Divine Force working, even though one is identified with the outer consciousness. For example, while going about one's daily business, occupied with tasks in the outer mind and demands of other energies in the vital and physical, one still feels the Divine Force working in the subliminal behind the screen separating the inner from the outer consciousness.

*To allow for the Divine Force to work within oneself, one needs to get in contact with it, keep it, open to it exclusively ("to put yourself on its side"), have faith and trust in it, call it quietly and let it do its work.*

In the third stage this screen does not exist anymore, the Divine Force is felt working in and through oneself at all times.

To become aware of the Divine Force, one can either "go inside" and develop a sense for the subliminal invisible worlds where the Divine Force can be experienced directly in its workings, or rely on faith and openness. Following the first suggestion one can become able to "see, follow and use" the Divine Force "as the scientist" (p. 182), while the second approach brings indirect evidence for its working by repeated noticed effects on the consciousness after calling for it. Like other processes in the Integral Yoga, being aware of the working of the Divine Force can increase from a single experience to ever more frequent, clear and intense experiences

until the Divine Force establishes itself in the system and becomes the new normal. The condition for this is faith in the Divine Force and its working, even though the outward physical mind does not get any evidence in the beginning. In interacting with the Divine Force, one can become able "to direct it, manipulate it, watch its movement, be conscious of its mass and intensity and in the same way of that of other perhaps opposing forces" (p. 182).

### The influence of the Guru

A true Guru has realized an aspect of the Divine and embodies it. By surrender to the Guru the disciple surrenders to the Divine, thereby increasing its influence on him. The Guru can help also with mental guidance in teaching, but his help should

not limit the relation between the disciple and the Divine in the Integral Yoga. In Integral Yoga, there are many other ways the disciple can experience the Divine; "as the Source, the living Sun of Light and Knowledge and Consciousness and spiritual realisation and all that one receives" (p. 193).

In general, different Gurus make different aspects of the Divine accessible through their different attainments and their specific outer character, which resonate with disciple's souls seeking experiences and spiritual progress and their outer nature's preferences. If one seriously desires to practice the Integral Yoga, one should guard against different influences entering the spiritual atmosphere created by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in oneself, allowing for their force to act. Even other true Gurus and their





genuine spiritual influence could disrupt the process guided by The Mother, as other traditions follow unique processes that aim at different spiritual outcomes.

The disciple should accept the Guru in his transcendent, impersonal and personal aspects. The proper attitude of the disciple is one of confidence in the Guru. Sri Aurobindo implies a comparison between the times when the traditions of Yoga originated and our modern times. In ancient Indian culture the demand of the disciple's following was obvious. The critical attitude towards obedience to a worldly Guru today might be due to the dominance of the vital mind in our current westernized global culture. Furthermore, Sri Aurobindo lays down three aspects that make up the ideal attitude of the disciple towards the Guru. First, one should submit oneself completely to one chosen Guru and sever ties to all others. Second, the directions of the Guru should be followed with faith and perseverance to the best of one's abilities. Third, the sadhak should open him- or herself to the subtle spiritual influence of the Guru. The disciple's capacity for this depends on his openness, humility, devotion, trust, passive receptivity, discipline, control, fidelity, as well as self-giving and surrender to the Guru.

In this context, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the usefulness of a happy, cheerful obedience. By being independent, critical, questioning, prideful and arrogant the disciple withdraws from the Guru's influence, follows his mental and vital ego, subduing the spiritual tendencies in himself. Still, the Guru's and the Divine's influence often work behind the veil to turn the disciple back to the path of spiritual progress. If the disciple shows "definitive revolt, by rejection of the Guru, by cutting the painter and declaring his

independence, or by an act of course of betrayal that severs him from his own psychic being" (p. 196), the Guru's influence would be diminished. Confession of missteps "clears the inner air" and strengthens the influence of the Guru on the disciple (p. 193). If one tries to rely on the inner guidance before one has a good enough discernment, one could mistake the voices of the ego or other lower influences for the "inner Guru."

Opening to the Guru's spiritual influence can open oneself to the true spiritual knowledge found in the deeper consciousness behind and above one's ordinary consciousness. Sri Aurobindo sums up the attitude of surrender to the Guru and the Divine as follows: "Here I am, ready to throw from me all that was myself or seemed to be, if so I can enter into Thee; re-make my consciousness into the Truth in thy way, the way of the Divine" (p. 201).

The Guru's spiritual consciousness, knowledge, light, power and Divinity can help the disciple to grow into his divine potential. For this the disciple needs to open to the Guru and the Guru needs to "identify with the disciple, [...] take him into his own consciousness" (p. 197). Surrender to the Guru can help the disciple to open to the personal aspect of the Divine, bringing him closer to the "complete surrender to the total Divine" (p. 193). When the disciple's surrender to the Guru is like that of a "baby cat," in which there is a connection between the psychic and the emotional vital that influences the outer mind and vital as well, the disciple can experience a "state of Grace." In this state the disciple can receive the Grace of the Guru and the Divine, which can make the sadhana "sure and secure" and work out all remaining impurities and resistances with time (pp. 195–196). In

fact, Sri Aurobindo describes the mediation of the Guru as a "direct action of the Divine who is realized by the Guru," as "almost indispensable" (p. 197), because of the possible detours with their pitfalls an aspirant could take without the proper guidance.

## Equality

Equality (*samata*) is one of the first conditions of beginning the actual Integral Yoga, illustrating how this Yoga begins where others end. It is an essential experience that needs to become a constant base for further progress. In the context of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, equality means an inner state in which one is not compelled to action by outward events, but is able to observe events calmly and chose the appropriate action. While a preparatory mental approximation of equality can become a rigid concept in itself, that tries to make things "equal" in the physical manifestation and thereby misjudges them in their practical utility (remember the example of the Mahout Brahman), the true equality comes from deeper within, from the soul, or from the experience of the Divine Self in all. Therefore, equality can also be experienced as descending from above.

This deeper yogic experience still allows for the outer mind to engage with the physical manifestation and its dualities in a useful way, without losing the perspective of the broader consciousness behind or above it. The practical benefit is a detached evaluation and interaction with fellow beings and the absence of personal feelings that might lead to misunderstandings. This attitude can be extended towards friends and enemies alike, without losing the practical wisdom of daily life, for example, knowing who to associate with, or better, refusing to associate



with, or living in the best atmosphere for the process of sadhana to unfold. Similarly, equality does not mean a passive acceptance of temporary setbacks in sadhana or physical health, but a good condition for sound judgment to be made about what should be done. In the full experience, “[s]amata means a wide universal peace, calm, equanimity, an equal feeling of all in the Divine” (p. 130). This does not necessarily mean that the ego has completely dissolved. Although in a complete state of equality there are no attachments or aversions, there might still be a subtler ego hiding. It can be experienced in the mind as well as the vital. A complementary yogic experience to the more passive equality is the more dynamic bhakti coming from the psychic being.

Equality allows for self-mastery, especially over the vital movements, which without a base of equality are often triggered by outward interactions. With equality, one is able to always keep the inner detachment in all favorable or unfavorable circumstances. Therefore, it can prevent unnecessary quarrels with others that would disturb the atmosphere conducive to the process of the Yoga. Freed from the personal opinion or feeling about a person or other subject matter, the higher consciousness which can descend into the base of equality can give knowledge and vision of the subtler forces and beings influencing people’s actions on an individual and collective level. While we in our ordinary consciousness might believe sometimes aggressive reactions towards others to be necessary for our self-defense, Sri Aurobindo argues that “a strong, large and equal

attitude towards men and things would be a much better line of defense” (p. 131). Samata allows for any attack—inner or outer—to be dealt with in a calm and detached manner. Equality frees us from our constant involvement with the energies and formations of the duality and allows for a higher power to intervene through us. Once samata is established in us for good, the progress of the sadhana becomes much more smooth, as it also makes it easier for the Mother’s Force to work in us.

In general, one has to reject vital movements, to not let vital energies enter through arguments with others or perceived misfortune, etc., not to let these energies take oneself and speak

*Samata allows for any attack—inner or outer—to be dealt with in a calm and detached manner. Equality frees us from our constant involvement with the energies and formations of the duality and allows for a higher power to intervene through us.*

and act through oneself. A first step towards this is to evaluate one’s own consciousness and find in any part of the being that which is adverse to the higher Truth, Consciousness and the Divine, admit that it’s there, and then offer it “to the Divine for the Light and Grace to descend and substitute for it the right movement of the true consciousness” (p. 131), in order to attain “the poise of the spirit” (p. 133). With time, the full experience of equality can develop through the full consecration and offering in the heart, the soul’s surrender to the Divine, the descent of the higher consciousness, and a further continuous rejection of everything resisting this in the lower nature. Faith is a useful quality to cultivate to keep equality in difficult situations, especially as the complete

equality takes a long time to establish. To prepare one’s ordinary consciousness to “be free from all preference and receive joyfully whatever comes from the Divine Will” (p. 134), one should see everything happening to oneself as given by the Divine for the fastest progress. Another first step towards samata can be a strong mental control, although it should not be mistaken for samata.

### **Quietude, calm, peace, and silence**

Quietude, calm, peace and silence can be understood as essential states of consciousness that in the course of the sadhana develop sequentially. The development into silence often takes a long time, with much of it happening behind the veil, without the sadhak’s knowledge as he is identified with the outer consciousness. This can be avoided by bringing the psychic being in front first, to have a conscious experience of the inner process. In any case, over-eagerness and impatience hinder the process, as they can disturb the balance and quietude. Often a “double mind” develops as an interim state, with the more still part inside and the dynamic part on the outside. This shows that these states of consciousness do not mean an inactive mind, incapable of work. Also, one should not understand this as a way to get rid of the mind itself, but rather of changing its quality from restless to more and more still.

While quietude is the first step out of our ordinary restless mind which has the habit of and attachment to continuous thinking, silence builds a solid



foundation for the higher consciousness to descend and leads us into the true Integral Yoga. It allows for the development of siddhis as well. Each state is more impervious to outer energies disturbing it. While quietude is more of a negative state, an absence of agitation in the mind, calm is already more positive, bringing tranquility and a greater relative inner distance to outer dynamics.

Quietude allows for the development of the perspective of being an observer to the dynamics of the outer mind. A quiet mind sees thoughts as something other than itself, is unidentified and lets them pass through. A quiet mind can also be experienced as vacant, an emptiness, which should be endured without impatience until the higher consciousness descends into it. In order to attain a quiet mind, one needs to go within, let go of one's desires, keep the contact to the Mother, an inner attitude of simplicity and ideally of surrender. In turn, cultivating quietude makes it easier for the Mother and the higher parts of oneself like the psychic to influence the whole being. Quietude in the mind, vital and nerves can protect oneself from outer energies entering to disturb the inner atmosphere. In the course of the sadhana, this inner state should become independent of outer circumstances.

A calm mind is different from a vacant mind in so far as the latter means the complete absence of any mental action, while the former means that the mind-substance itself is changed, into "a substance of eternal and indestructible peace" (p. 145), without losing its ability to act, and expressing inspiration from above efficiently without distorting it. While thoughts pass through it, they do not arise from itself anymore. It is not simply quiet which is not disturbed by thoughts, but it keeps its calmness in the inter-

action with thoughts, and it is not silence, as there still is an interplay with thoughts. The calm in the inner mind makes dealing with the dynamic outer mind easier. Calm is also a quality of the Sat-Purusha. In the progression of the sadhana, calm has to fill the whole being, not only the mind, but also the physical and cells. Also, the calm needs to become wide, to receive more and more of the descending peace and everything else it brings.

Peace, often experienced as a positive force descending from above into the mind, brings new qualities like harmony and a first taste of Ananda. Before its descent, the peace can be felt above the head, where one can connect to it. The peace descending in the mind, life, body and surroundings allows for an opening of the consciousness to and a descent of the higher states and divine qualities like Light, Force and Ananda. A stable peace is also a condition for the transformation of the consciousness through the working of the Divine Force.

Silence brings a complete cessation to the ordinary activities of the mind, which have previously been sublimated through quietude and calm. While the mind has been already made receptive to the higher consciousness through peace, in silence it opens to a completely different kind of activity of the higher consciousness. In a silent mind thoughts have been "banished" or the silence has been brought about by the descending peace. Sri Aurobindo describes the later experience: "one feels it coming down, entering and occupying, or surrounding the personal consciousness which then tends to merge itself in the vast impersonal silence" (p. 142). There are different kinds of experiences of stillness possible, like a "fundamental limitless calm of the cosmic consciousness" or the "calm of the Atman, the Self above, si-

lent, immutable and infinite" (p. 147).

To experience permanent peace in one's system takes time and effort. The experience occurs seldom and for brief moments at first, then frequency and duration increase over the course of the sadhana. Peace can be experienced psychologically in the mind and vital, with the subtle senses in the subtle body or materially in the material substance (physical mind, nervous being). When the peace gets established in the system, it allows for other forces beneficial to the Yoga to come in as well and adverse things to fall off. It brings with it a happiness ("gladness, sense of inner ease and welfare, contentment, a sunlit life," p. 157), Ananda (not possible to experience permanently without peace as a basis), and a "passivity" to the influence of the Divine Force, in the sense that formations and energies that would otherwise obstruct the working of the higher consciousness in the adhara are removed and kept out, therefore making oneself more receptive to the spiritual force. "The greater the quietude, the greater the energy that can be received" (p. 155). This spiritual peace is not inertia, but the latter can be seen as a degradation of the divine quality in the manifestation. Also the "depth" of the experience of peace in the system increases with time. Usually, the process involves the descent of the peace from above, so the mind, vital, and physical nature experience it successively to the degree that they aspire for this, reject whatever other influences from the lower nature resist, and surrender to the working of the higher force bringing the peace.

Akin to the downward movement of the peace, there is an outward movement as well, as it gets established in the inner parts of the being first, "flooding" the outer nature later. While the peace is experienced as more intense and vast in the inner be-





ing, through its influence the contents of the outer nature can be “changed into thoughts, forces, emotions, sensations which have in their very stuff an essence of inner silence and peace” (p. 153). This process can lead to the peace keeping outer influences in the environmental consciousness, not allowing them to enter. “One must therefore be very careful until it is fixed; once fixed it usually defends itself, for all outer contacts become surface things to a consciousness full of the higher peace” (p. 151). While the peace is being established in the mind, there might still be disturbances in the vital, just as there can be agitation in the surface mind, with the peace already established in the inner. The peace is very useful in the vital as it fills it with something positive, which automatically keeps out the hindering influences, which in turn allows more easily for the right kind of action. In the physical body the peace can be experienced as something very concrete, even as “peace in the cells” (p. 152).

At some point the sadhak will identify himself with the peace and vastness, then the previous dynamic has been reversed. In the ordinary state, the ego was full of energies permeating it from the subtle worlds of the mind and vital, allowing only for brief experiences of peace or silence descending from above or coming forth from the innermost being, or psychic being. Now, identifying with the silent self within and above, the outer and lower influences become minor waves on the surface, or seem like pebbles on the beach of a vast, wide ocean that feels “at once individual and universal” (p. 154). This can be understood as a yogic realization. Then one feels

free and the surface being as something not belonging to oneself or even as “something moving about in the atmosphere, trying to enter but unable to do so” (p. 153). But this is only possible “when the descents of Peace have turned into a massive stability of Peace” (p. 154). This opens the sadhana to new possibilities: “Peace is a sign of mukti—Ananda moves towards siddhi” (p. 157).

Silence develops progressively throughout the being to the degree that one can open to the Divine Consciousness. This state of consciousness can be potentially achieved at once, if one was able to completely lose all identification with thought-formations, experience them as something

*The more quiet the mind becomes, the easier it is for the Divine Forces to work in the being, changing the nature, and in turn establishing the silence.*

foreign coming from the outside and refuse to let them into one's being. An absolute silence in the inner nature seems to be able to automatically repel all formations or energies trying to enter into the outer mind from the environmental. Once the silence comes into the mind, if there were no interest at all in thoughts they could pass through the silence without disturbing it. It is important to reject outer formations wanting to enter in order for the silence to settle in the system. The rejection of lower outer energies wanting to enter should itself be calm and still. This is possible by turning within, and through a silent will which reveals itself through the Purusha, the true individuality, allows one to stand back from the dynamics of the outer nature, Prakriti. One can also “call” for the Force to establish the silence, or imagine it above the head, waiting for

it to descend without impatience. A more gradual approach would aim at a quiet mind which is able to observe thoughts without agitation first, which then widens into silence. The more quiet the mind becomes, the easier it is for the Divine Forces to work in the being, changing the nature, and in turn establishing the silence. Then a stillness of the very stuff of the parts of the being, be it mental or vital, can increase in depth.

In a passive silence, the Divine can be experienced as static, without any movements or thoughts, a preparatory state of lightness, voidness and release, which does not react to anything outside. Active silence also consists of a fundamental silence, but into this, without disturbing its base of silence, “all higher thought and aspiration and movements” (p. 158) as well as “knowledge, joy, love and other spiritual feelings” (p. 163) can come, also effecting change outside oneself. Therefore, active silence in the mind allows for the development of true knowledge, exceeding that of the ignorance of the ordinary mind. The ordinary mental consciousness “creates surface ideas and representations which are not true knowledge” (p. 159). The active silence brings power to manifest the higher knowledge descending into it. This is possible because the mind is free of the “waste” of the surface mind's activities. Another dynamic allowed for by the silent mind is the descent of peace from above and the ascent of the consciousness to the vast Self above. When the consciousness goes up, intuitive mind or even overmind can develop. Other activities in the silent mind can include the working of the Mother's Force and the purifying fire of Agni.



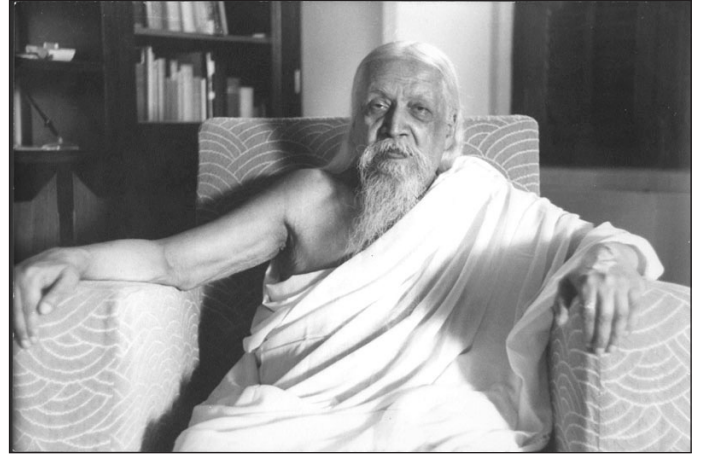
## Source material

### The significance of rebirth

by Sri Aurobindo

What we are is a soul of the transcendent Spirit and Self unfolding itself in the cosmos in a constant evolutionary embodiment of which the physical side is only a pedestal of form corresponding in its evolution to the ascending degrees of the spirit, but the spiritual growth is the real sense and motive. What is behind us is the past terms of the spiritual evolution, the upward gradations of the spirit already climbed, by which through constant rebirth we have developed what we are, and are still developing this present and middle human term of the ascension. What is around us is the constant process of the unfolding in its universal aspect: the past terms are there contained in it, fulfilled, overpassed by us, but in general and various type still repeated as a support and background; the present terms are there not as an unprofitable recurrence, but in active pregnant gestation of all that is yet to be unfolded by the spirit, no irrational decimal recurrence helplessly repeating for ever its figures, but an expanding series of powers of the Infinite. What is in front of us is the greater potentialities, the steps yet unclimbed, the intended mightier manifestations. Why we are here is to be this means of the spirit's upward self-unfolding. What we have to do with ourselves and our significances is to grow and open them to greater significances of divine being, divine consciousness, divine power, divine delight and multiplied unity, and what we have to do with our environment is to use it consciously for increasing spiritual purposes and make it more and more a mould for the ideal unfolding of the perfect nature and self-conception of the Divine in the cosmos. This is surely the Will in things which moves, great and deliberate, unhasting, unresting, through whatever cycles, towards a greater and greater informing of its own finite figures with its own infinite Reality.

All this is to the mind that lives in the figures of the present, as it must be to the careful sceptical mind of positive inquiry, no more than a hypothesis; for if evolution is an acknowledged idea, rebirth itself is only a supposition. Take it so, but still it is a better hypothesis than the naïve and childlike religious solutions which make the world an arbitrary caprice and man the breathing clay puppet of an almighty human-minded Creator, and at least as good a



hypothesis as the idea of a material inconscient Force somehow stumbling into a precarious, ephemeral, yet always continued phenomenon of consciousness, or a creative Life labouring in the Bergsonian formula oppressed but constant in the midst of a universal death, as good too as the idea of a mechanical working of Prakriti, Maya, Shakti into which or in which a real or unreal individual stumbles and wanders, *dandramyamāno andhena nīyamāno yathāndhah*,\* until he can get out of it by a spiritual liberation. To a large philosophical questioning it will not seem in disagreement with the known lines of existence or out of tune with the facts and necessities of being or the demands of reason and intuition, even though it admits a yet unrealised factor, things yet to be; for that is implied in the very idea of evolution. It may modify, but does not radically contradict any religious experience or aspiration,—for it is not inconsistent either with a union with Superconscience or bliss in heavens beyond or any personal or impersonal relation with the Divine, since these may well be heights of the spiritual unfolding. Its truth will depend on spiritual experience and effectuation; but chiefly on this momentous issue, whether there is anything in the soul-powers of man which promises a greater term of being than his present mentality and whether that greater term can be made effective for his embodied existence. That is the question which remains over to be tested by psychological inquiry and the problem to be resolved in the course of the spiritual evolution of man.

There are transcendental questions of the metaphysical necessity, possibility, final reality of an evolutionary manifestation of this kind, but they do not need to be brought in now and here; for the time we are concerned only with its reality to experience and with the processional significance of rebirth, with the patent fact that we are a part of some kind of manifestation and move forward in



the press of some kind of evolution. We see a Power at work and seek whether in that power there is a conscious Will, an ordered development and have first to discover whether it is the blind result of an organised Chance or inconscient self-compelled Law or the plan of a universal Intelligence or Wisdom. Once we find that there is a conscious Spirit of which this movement is one expression, or even admit that as our working hypothesis, we are bound to go on and ask whether this developing order ceases with what man now is or is laden with something more towards which it and he have to grow, an unfinished expression, a greater unbound term, and in that case it is evidently towards that greater thing that man must be growing; to prepare it and to realise it must be the stage beyond in his destiny. Towards that new step in the evolution his history as a race must be subconsciously tending and the powers of the highest individuals half consciously striving to be delivered of this greater birth; and since the ascending order of rebirth follows always the degrees of the evolution, that too cannot be meant to stop short or shoot off abruptly into the superconscient without any regard to the intended step. The relation of our birth to life on other levels of consciousness and to whatever transcendent Superconscience there may be, are important problems, but their solution must be something in harmony with the intention of the Spirit in the universe; all must be part of a unity, and not an imbroglio of spiritual incoherences and contradictions. Our first bridge from the known to the unknown on this line of thought must be to discover how far the yet unfinished ladder of evolution can mount in the earth series. The whole processional significance of rebirth may be wrapped up in that one yet unattempted discovery. (*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vol. 13, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, pp. 303-306).

The spiritual process of evolution is then in some sense a creation, but a self-creation, not a making of what never was, but a bringing out of what was implicit in the Being. The Sanskrit word for creation signifies a loosing forth, a letting out into the workings of Nature. The Upanishad in a telling figure applies the image of the spider which brings its web out of itself and creates the structure in which it takes its station. That is applied in the ancient Scripture not to the evolution of things out of Matter, but to an original bringing of temporal becoming out of the eternal infinity; Matter itself and this material universe are only such a web or indeed no more than a part of it brought out from the spiritual being of the Infinite. (CWSA, Vol. 13, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, pp. 322-323)

\* Beating about like the blind led by the blind.

## A double evolution

by the Mother

If you take terrestrial history, all the forms of life have appeared one after another in a general plan, a general programme, with the addition, always, of a new perfection and a greater consciousness. Take just animal forms—for that is easier to understand, they are the last before man—each animal that appeared had an additional perfection in its general nature—I don't mean in all the details—a greater perfection than the preceding ones, and the crowning point of the ascending march was the human form which, for the moment, from the point of view of consciousness, is the form most capable of manifesting consciousness; that is, the human form at its height, at the height of its possibilities, is capable of more consciousness than all preceding animal forms.

This is one of Nature's ways of evolution.

Sri Aurobindo told us last week that this Nature was following an ascending progression in order to manifest more and more the divine consciousness contained in all forms. So, with each new form that it produces, Nature makes a form capable of expressing more completely the spirit which this form contains. But if it were like this, a form comes, develops, reaches its highest point and is followed by another form; the others do not disappear, but the individual does not progress. The individual dog or monkey, for instance, belongs to a species which has its own peculiar characteristics; when the monkey or the man arrives at the height of its possibilities, that is, when a human individual becomes the best type of humanity, it will be finished; the individual will not be able to progress any farther. He belongs to the human species, he will continue to belong to it. So, from the point of view of terrestrial history there is a progress, for each species represents a progress compared with the preceding species; but from the point of view of the individual, there is no progress: he is born, he follows his development, dies and disappears. Therefore, to ensure the progress of the individual, it was necessary to find another means; this one was not adequate. But within the individual, contained in each form, there is an organisation of consciousness which is closer to and more directly under the influence of the inner divine Presence, and the form which is under this influence—this kind of inner concentration of energy—has a life independent of the physical form—this is what we generally call the “soul” or the “psychic being”—and since it is organised around the divine centre it partakes of the divine nature which is immortal, eternal. The outer body falls





away, and this remains throughout every experience that it has in each life, and there is a progress from life to life, and it is the progress of the same individual. And this movement complements the other, in the sense that instead of a species which progresses relative to other species, it is an individual who passes through all the stages of progress of these species and can continue to progress even when the species have reached the limit of their possibilities and... stay there or disappear—it depends on the case—but they cannot go any farther, whereas the individual, having a life independent of the purely material form, can pass from one form to another and continue his progress indefinitely. That makes a double movement which completes itself. And that is why each individual has the possibility of reaching the utmost realisation, independent of the form to which he momentarily belongs...

Perhaps later we shall see that a certain state of inner organisation is necessary for this psychic being to be able to have memories in the way the mental being has them—we shall speak about it later, when we come to it in the book—but in any case the fact is established: it is this double movement of evolution intersecting and complementing itself which gives the utmost possibilities of realisation to the divine light within each being. This is what Sri Aurobindo has explained. (*Turning to the child*) This means that in your outer body you belong to the animal species in the course of becoming a supramental species—you are not that yet! but within you there's a psychic being which has already lived in many, many, countless species before and carries an experience of thousands of years within you, and which will continue while your human body remains human and finally decomposes. We shall see later whether this psychic being has the possibility of transforming its body and itself creating an intermediate species between the animal man and superman—we shall study this later—but still, for the moment, it is an immortal soul which becomes more and more conscious of itself in the body of man. (*Collected*

*Works of the Mother (CWM)*, 2004, Vol. 9, *Questions and Answers 1957–1958*, pp. 214–217).

There are in the psychic being two very different kinds of progress: one consisting in its formation, building and organisation. For the psychic starts by being only a kind of tiny divine spark within the being and out of this spark will emerge progressively an independent conscious being having its own action and will. The psychic being at its origin is only a spark of the divine consciousness and it is through successive lives that it builds up a conscious individuality. It is a progress similar to that of a growing child. It is a thing in the making. For a long time, in most human beings the psychic is a being in the making. It is not a fully individualised, fully conscious being and master of itself and it needs all its rebirths, one after another, in order to build itself and become fully conscious. But this sort of progress has an end. There comes a time when the being is fully developed, fully individualised, fully master of itself and its destiny. When this being or one of these psychic beings has reached that stage and takes birth in a human being, that makes a very great difference: the human being, so to say, is born free. He is not tied to circumstances, to surroundings, to his origin and atavism, like ordinary people. He comes into the world with the purpose of doing something, with a work to carry out, a mission to fulfil. From this point of view his progress in growth has come to an end, that is, it is not indispensable for him to take birth again in a body. Till then rebirth is a necessity, for it is through rebirth that he grows; it is in the physical life and in a physical body that he gradually develops and becomes a fully conscious being. But once he is fully formed, he is free, in this sense that he can take birth or not, at will. So there, one kind of progress stops.

But if this fully formed being wants to become an instrument of work for the Divine, if instead of retiring to repose in a psychic bliss, in its own domain, he chooses to be a worker upon earth to help in the fulfilment of the Divine Work, then he has a fresh progress to make, a progress in the capacity for work, for organisation of his work and for expression of the Divine Will. So there is a time when the thing changes. So long as he remains in the world, so long as he chooses to work for the Divine, he will progress. Only if he withdraws into the psychic world and refuses to continue doing the Divine Work or renounces it, can he remain in a static condition outside all progress, because, as I have told you, only upon earth is there progress, only in the physical world; it is not acquired everywhere. In the psychic world there is a kind of blissful repose. One remains what one is, without any movement. (*CWM*, 2003, Vol. 5, *Questions and Answers 1953*, pp. 203–204).



## *The poetry room*

### **Rebirth**

Not soon is God's delight in us completed,  
Nor with one life we end;  
Termlessly in us are our spirits seated,  
A termless joy intend.

Our souls and heaven are of an equal stature  
And have a dateless birth;  
The unending seed, the infinite mould of Nature,  
They were not made on earth,

Nor to the earth do they bequeath their ashes,  
But in themselves they last.  
An endless future brims beneath thy lashes,  
Child of an endless past.

Old memories come to us, old dreams invade us,  
Lost people we have known,  
Fictions and pictures; but their frames evade us,—  
They stand out bare, alone.

Yet all we dream and hope are memories treasured,  
Are forecasts we misspell,  
But of what life or scene he who has measured  
The boundless heavens can tell.

Time is a strong convention; future and present  
Were living in the past;  
They are one image that our wills complaisant  
Into three schemes have cast.

Our past that we forget, is with us deathless,  
Our births and later end  
Already accomplished. To a summit breathless  
Sometimes our souls ascend,

Whence the mind comes back helped; for there emerges  
The ocean vast of Time  
Spread out before us with its infinite surges,  
Its symphonies sublime;

And even from this veil of mind the spirit  
Looks out sometimes and sees  
The bygone aeons that our lives inherit,  
The unborn centuries.

It sees wave-trampled realms expel the Ocean,—  
From the vague depths uphurled  
Where now Himaloy stands, the flood's huge motion  
Sees measuring half the world;

Or else the web behind us is unravelled  
And on its threads we gaze,—  
Past motions of the stars, scenes long since travelled  
In Time's far-backward days.

—Sri Aurobindo

### **Emanation<sup>1</sup>**

Out of the depths of the Infinite Being eternal,  
Out of the cloud more bright than the brightness of sun,  
Out of the inmost the essence of spirit supernal,  
We issued as one.

First essence electric, concentric, revolving, subduing,  
We throbbed through the ether, a part of the infinite germ,  
Dissolving, resolving, absorbing, reforming, renewing,  
The endless in term.

Through forms multifarious onward and ever advancing,  
Progressing through ether from molecule to planet and star,  
Forms infinitesimal revealed by the sunbeam while dancing,  
Controlled from afar.

Then part of the elements swayed by invisible forces,  
The spirit of flame interchangeably water and air,  
And matter more gross, still moulded by stars in their  
courses,  
To forms new and rare.

Part of the salt of the sea—of the fathomless ocean—  
Part of the growth of the earth, and the light hid within,  
The Boundless and Endless revealed in each varying motion  
Unknown yet to sin.

The breath of all life, harmonious, ductile, complying,  
Obedient lapsed in the force of the Infinite Will,  
Untiring, unresting, incessant, unknowing, undying,  
Love's law we fulfill.

Spirit of growth in the rocks, and the ferns, and the mosses,  
Spirit of growth in the trees, and the grasses, and flowers,  
Rejoicing in life, unconscious of changes or losses,  
Of days or of hours.



Spirit of growth in the bird and the bee, ever tending  
To form more complex its beauty and use thus combined,  
Adapted perfection, the finite and infinite blending,  
One gleam from One Mind.

Thus spirally upward we come from the depths of creation,  
the man and the woman—the garden of Eden have found,  
And joined by the Lord in an endless and holy relation  
Ensphered and made round.

The innermost law of their being fulfilling, obeying,  
The King and the Queen, perfected, companioned, are  
crowned,  
The Incomprehensible thus in expression conveying  
Its ultimate bound.

Obedience still is the law of each fresh emanation,  
The prayer to the Father, 'Not my will, but Thy will be done.'  
Then deathless, immortal, we pass through all forms of creation,  
The twain lost in One.

—Ella Dietz

## God<sup>2</sup>

Once, long before the birth of time, a storm  
Of white desire, by its own ardour hurled,  
Flashed out of infinite Desire, took form,  
Strove, won, survived: and God became the world.

Next, some internal force began to move  
Within the bosom of that latest earth:  
The spirit of an elemental love  
Stirred outward from itself, and God was birth.

Then outward, upward, with heroic thew,  
Savage from young and bursting blood of life,  
Desire took form, and conquered, and anew  
Strove, conquered, and took form, and God was strife

Thus, like a comet, fiery flight on flight;  
Flash upon flash, and purple morn on morn:  
but always out of agony—delight;  
And out of death—God evermore reborn,

Till, waxing fair and subtle and supreme,  
Desiring his own spirit to possess,  
Man of the bright eyes and ardent dream  
Saw paradise, and God was consciousness.

He is that one Desire, that life, that breath,  
That Soul which, with infinity of pain,  
Passes through revelation and through death  
Onward and upward to itself again.

Out of the lives of heroes and their deeds,  
Out of the miracle of human thought,  
Out of the songs of singers, God proceeds;  
And of the soul of them his Soul is wrought.

Nothing is lost: all that is dreamed or done  
Passes unaltered the eternal way,  
Immerging in the everlasting One,  
Who was the dayspring and who is the day.

—Harold Monro

## Auroville<sup>3</sup>

Have you seen the giants walking  
Across the wide red land?  
Seen them moving large and grand  
Against the sky?  
I have seen them coming,  
Tiny seedlings in their hands,  
Hands and feet as red  
As the dirt they work each day,  
Carrying the future on their backs and in their  
dreams—

Seen them growing tall and strong  
As they hammer out their way  
In a land of yielding beauty  
Making progress from delay,  
Seen them growing wise and deep  
As they dig the hardened clay,  
Worry water from the dry red earth,  
Bend their backs,  
Sweat out their sorrows,  
Wrest from yesterday  
Tomorrows,  
Coming of a new world's birth.

Have you seen the giants working  
In the quiet secret places,  
In the kitchens, in the gardens,  
The world's forgotten spaces?  
I have seen them rise, emerging  
Out of ignorance and pain.  
Faith sustained, they work and labour





To create a new domain.  
A thousand tiny troubles  
Tell the story of their struggle  
As they strive to bring alive  
A long forsaken dream;  
In their hearts an angel singing,  
Being's beauty widely winging  
As they grow to know the truth  
Of creation's will to be  
A living harmony.  
Have you seen their victory?

Have you seen the giants working  
High atop construction beams?  
Suffering the toils of their hardest dreams?  
I have seen them growing, changing,  
Working, working out the problems  
Of a vast and varied nature  
Through necessity and failure I  
With enduring dedication,  
Consecrated to completion,  
Seen them struggle with the grasping  
Of the passing ways of time;  
Hoping deep enough to open,  
Feeling love enough to trust,  
Finding courage to create  
A living wonder with their labour.  
From the nameless, from the formless  
You can see a promise rising  
In the clearer, higher spaces  
At the centre of the city;  
Breathless peace, transcendent beauty.  
While the glorious expansion  
Of the limitless in man  
Opens wide the striving hearts,  
To manifest the miracle of destiny's decree.

—Loretta Shartsis

### Soul in progress...

Your soul wants to take your hand in Dance  
Like two leaves lifting off the Road

It wants to walk arm in arm to the Sea  
Take in the warmth of a Sun rising

It wants to know the yellow winged Bird

hear the Gravel cracking underfoot  
greet the Fly settled on your brow  
It wants to guess a Child's temperature by a kiss  
Feel the touch of little Hands in your hair

It needs to record these Experiences  
And create from them Leaf after leaf, after leaf  
Of poetry

—Kalyna Temertey-Canta

### whose kite is the sun?

whose kite is the sun?  
who fills the rosebud's red?

who drinks from the moon-jug  
and spills out the ocean?

who led my hands unchained,  
to join the white-winged free bird,  
laughing from above  
at the prison in the playground?

now they're busy lighting fires  
by a tent pitched in the stars  
for the face inside my heart.

who filled my pot with honey  
and let me in tonight?  
who smiled with my lips?

dervish-heart growing fuller,  
with every silent drumbeat.

—Navni Gujral

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2. Ibid., pp. 417–418.
3. Hofman, L. & Agni, V. (eds., 2007) *Devotion*. Auroville, India: Integral Enterprise, pp. 156–157.



## Apropos

Become and live the knowledge thou hast; then is thy knowledge the living God within thee. —Sri Aurobindo

This body is Thy instrument; this will is Thy servant; this intelligence is Thy tool; and the whole being is only Thyself. —The Mother

Nothing glows brighter than the heart awakened to the light of love that lives within it. —Guy Finley

The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears. —Native American proverb

The most common form of despair is not being who you are. —Søren Kierkegaard

To speak gratitude is courteous and pleasant, but to live gratitude is to touch heaven. —Johannes A. Gaertner

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

What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself. —Abraham H. Maslow

When we focus on clarifying what is being observed, felt, and needed rather than on diagnosing and judging, we discover the depth of our own compassion. —Marshall B. Rosenberg

Love gives us in a moment what we can hardly attain by effort after years of toil. —Goethe

Love's greatest gift is its ability to make everything it touches sacred. —Barbara De Angelis

Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them, that only creates sorrow. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like. —Lao-tzu

Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark. —Rabindranath Tagore

Love all God's creations, both the whole and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of light. Love the animals, love the plants, love each separate thing. If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in All. —Fyodor Dostoevsky

The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love. —Meister Eckhart

A person does not have to be behind bars to be a prisoner. People can be prisoners of their own concepts and ideas. They can be slaves to their own selves. —Maharaji

When we seek for connection, we restore the world to wholeness. Our seemingly separate lives become meaningful as we discover how truly necessary we are to each other. —Margaret Wheatley

Any situation that you find yourself in, is an outward reflection of your inner state of beingness. —El Morya

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

Of the Good in you I can speak, but not of the Evil. For what is Good, tortured by its own hunger and thirst? When Good is hungry, it seeks food, even in dark caves, and when it thirsts, it drinks even of dead waters. —Kahlil Gibran

The ultimate lesson all of us have to learn is unconditional love, which includes not only others but ourselves as well. —Elisabeth Kubler Ross

