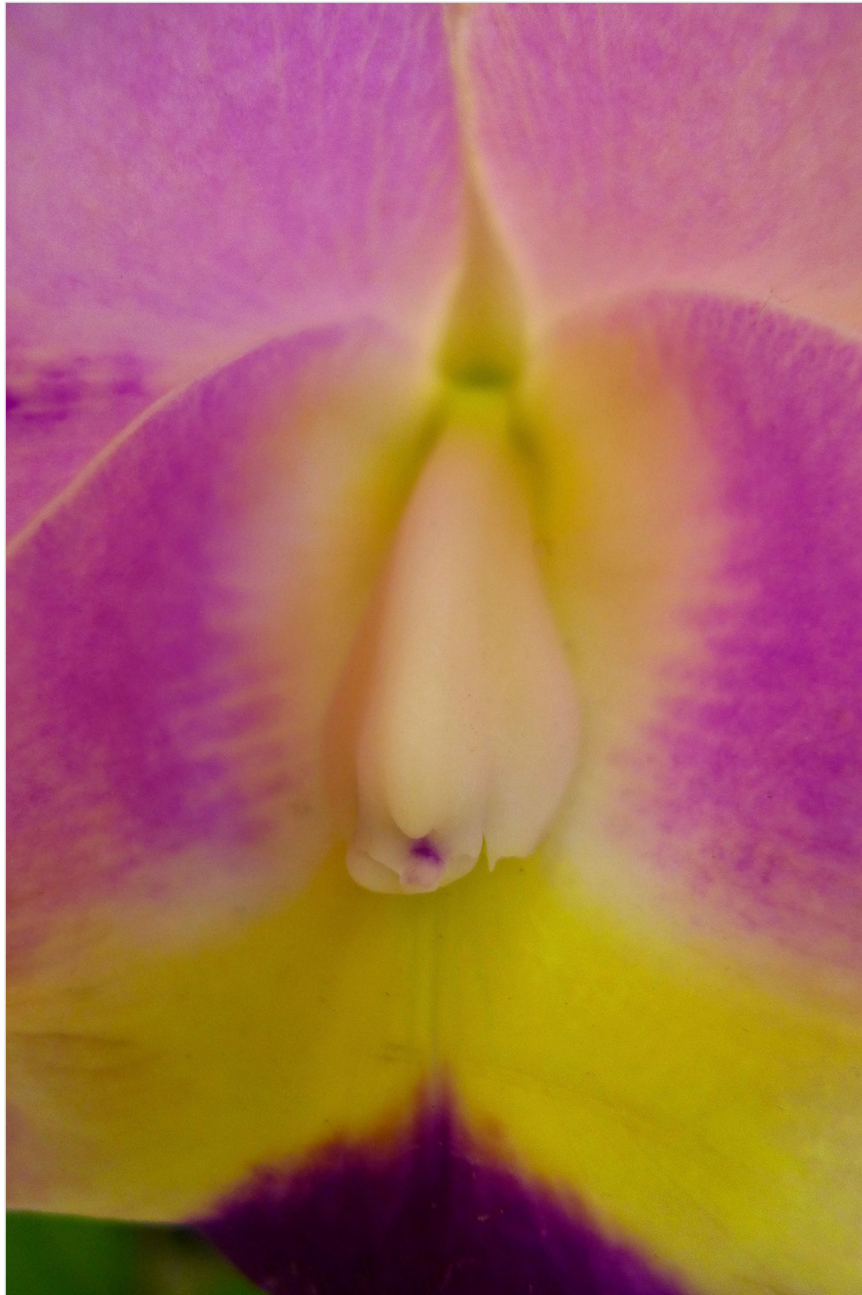


Collaboration

Winter 2017/2018

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 42, No. 3



Mind, master of the house by Richard Pearson •
The First Nations and the soul of America, Part 3 by Karen Mitchell •
Bridging the divide by Girija Shettar • Sweetness by Lopa Mukherjee •
Education in the age of the Upanisads by Gopal Bhattacharyya •
Sri Aurobindo's Gnostic being and Nietzsche's Superman by Bharatwaj Iyer •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry room • Apropos



About the art on the front and back cover

Front cover: Titled "Subtle World," this orchid was photographed by August Timmermans. Orchids in general were given the significance "attachment to the Divine" by the Mother. On the back cover is another orchid, titled "The heart of matter." These and other fine art photographs can be found at: <https://august-timmermans.com>.

The authors and poets

Alan (alan@auroville.org.in) is a long-time Aurovilian, teacher, and one of the editors of Auroville Today.

Gopal Bhattacharyya (deceased) was a resident of Matagiri and later of the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles. He was a teacher of Sanskrit.

Navni Gujral (navni.gujral.navni@gmail.com) is a student and researcher at the Indian Psychology Institute (IPI) in Pondicherry.

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Shyam Kumari (shyamkumari@auromail.net) is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the author of many books related to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Karen Mitchell (karenmitchell404@gmail.com) worked as a clinical social worker and is now enjoying a "retirement of contemplation, conversation, writing, and traveling." Since 2008, she has been participating in events at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, CA.

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

Nirodbaran (deceased) was a physician, Sri Aurobindo's personal assistant, a poet and author, and Sri Aurobindo's scribe for Savitri.

Richard Pearson (RichardKailas@gmail.com), a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram since childhood, is an expert on flowers and plants.

Loretta Shartsis (loretta@auroville.org.in) came from America to Auroville in 1972. She does book compilations of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's works, gives lectures, and has two weekly broadcasts on Auroville Radio.

Girija Shettar (girija.shettar@hotmail.co.uk) is a writer based in London. Girija wrote her doctoral thesis on Sri Aurobindo's concepts of the psychic being and the integral Brahman. She is currently researching the borderland between science and spirituality.

Sundaram (deceased) was a Gujarati poet of wide repute. He joined the Ashram at Sri Aurobindo's invitation in 1945, where he was given responsibility for all Ashram Gujarati publications.

Thomas Traherne (1636-1674) was an English poet, clergyman, theologian, and religious writer.

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From the office of Collaboration

The artist

August Timmermans, a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, is from the Netherlands and lives in Marseille, France. His focus in photography is on "things, sites, and situations that appeal for their beauty and uniqueness." His photographs have appeared in many travel magazines. To view a selection of his fine art photography, visit his website at: <https://august-timmermans.com>. He may be contacted at: augusttimmermans@yahoo.com

In this issue, we begin with Current affairs, which presents news of the new Mother's Center in Boulder, CO, as well as of the Institute for Wholistic Education in Wilmot, WI and the Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco. This is followed by AV almanac, which presents an article by Alan of *Auroville Today* on the present status and future of the Galaxy plan of Auroville, based on interviews with various architects and town planners.

In our Salon section, we have one short article by Richard Pearson on developing control of the mind, based on the advice of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

In Chronicles, we continue with the third instalment of a multi-part article by Karen Mitchell on the First Nations and the soul of America. In Part 3, Karen explores the role of the experience of both individual and collective grief in spiritual growth. She discusses America's failure to grieve after 9/11 and its reactions of aggression and redoubled consumerism, as well as other manifestations of grief in contemporary American society. She also discusses some of her own experiences with grief as a counsellor, the experience and transforming effects of grief in *Savitri*, and the writings of Martín Prechtel about American Indian views of the role and importance of grief.

In Essays, we begin with an article by Girija Shettar, based on her interview with Debashish Banerji, about the need for better communication of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to people outside the circle of devotees. To help in this effort, she focuses in this article on the basic aims and processes of the Integral Yoga written in a relatively more reader-friendly language. The second essay is by Lopa Mukherjee on "sweetness," the importance of respectful and sensitive speech, and compassionate interactions with others, and the ramifications of the degeneration of these qualities in modern society. The third article is a scholarly examination of the character of education in the age of the Upanishads by the late Gopal Bhattacharyya, who was formerly a resident and scholar at the Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center and the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles. The fourth essay is a scholarly comparison of Sri Aurobindo's concept of the Gnostic being with Nietzsche's Superman by Bharatwaj Iyer, a young Indian scholar.

In Source material, we have selections by Sri Aurobindo on the nature of the Absolute, and by Mother on the role of the spirit. In the Poetry room, we have several poems by Sri Aurobindo as well as other spiritual poetry by various devotees and poets. We close the issue in *Apropos* with a selection of inspiring quotations. August Timmerman's artistic photography graces the covers.

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 February 1, 2018 to the editor at: editor@collaboration.org.

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

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

Center news

The Mother's Center is home to life-enriching events and activities including circle work, group meditation, private retreat space and support for the birthing journey. Sitting on 2 acres overlooking Boulder, CO, the land and house are blessed with peace, quietude and beauty. Most of what we do is in circle format—a safe and loving way to share, be acknowledged and enjoy the wisdom of others.

One evening per month is devoted to meditation and study on the integral yoga. We also plan to have one integral yoga retreat per year.

Everything we do we do as service offered to the Divine. We hope that each time you visit, you feel deeply renewed and connected to your Self so that you can better navigate through life's challenges and make increased progress in your own sadhana. Most of our events and circles are free of charge. Donations are always accepted. A few of our events require registration and payment.

We embrace the Divine Mother as the source and origin of our inspiration, the single fount of all our movements, collective and individual.

The Mother's Center of Boulder, Colorado, 271 Sky Trail Road, Boulder, CO 80302; Shari Hindman 303.499.9665; info@themotherscenter.org; www.themotherscenter.org

The Institute for Wholistic Education, in collaboration with Lotus Press www.lotuspress.com is continuing its development and publishing of study guides for Sri Aurobindo's major writings, as well as development of e-books for a variety of platforms. Links to the various online e-book sellers are available at www.lotuspress.com. We have also expanded our social media activities with a facebook presence at www.facebook.com/SriAurobindosWritings. Systematic posts of the Readings series are put up daily at this Facebook location as well as other social media platforms.

The 4th volume of *Readings in Sri Aurobindo's The Synthesis of Yoga* is now available. This is the 11th Volume in the series, which covers *Readings in The Life Divine* (3 vol.), *Readings in The Essays on the Gita* (2 vol.), *Readings in Re-birth and Karma*, *Readings in The Mother*, and *Readings in The Synthesis of Yoga* (4 vol.). Any center in the USA which has not yet requested and received their free copies for any of these volumes should contact us at santoshk@msn.com

Daily blog posts advancing the readings in Sri Aurobindo's major works continue. The current book of Sri Au-

robindo's being focused on is *The Ideal of Human Unity* with daily posts at <http://sriurobindostudies.wordpress.com>. All prior posts remain archived and accessible for those who want to study any of the earlier volumes in the series. Lotus Press now has 10 volumes of *Mother's Agenda* (Institute for Evolutionary Research) as well as a number of titles by Satprem on offer as well.

We are pleased to have acquired a quantity of *Sri Aurobindo or The Adventure of Consciousness* by Satprem (translated by Luc Venet) from the 1993 edition. This book is one of the most popular introductions to Sri Aurobindo since it first appeared in 1970. The quantity available is limited.

We are also working with Arun Chatterjee to make available a book on Vedanta and Western Philosophy in the Light of Sri Aurobindo, which we expect to have in hand by March 2018. The Institute also sponsors regular classes on reiki, levels 1, 2 and 3, conducted by Karuna Krinsky. The next class will take place in February or March 2018. The schedule is regularly updated and can be found at www.reikiteacher.org

A November Darshan Meditation gathering was hosted by the Institute at our Racine, WI location on Friday November 24, 2017. The program included a meditation, with reading from Savitri, a lunch and a video presentation by Sri M P Pandit on the subject "Integral Knowledge" from the DVD series that has been published by Dipti Publications.

Institute for Wholistic Education, 3425 Patzke Lane, Racine, WI 53405. 262 619 1798; www.wholisticinstitute.org

The Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF) in San Francisco will be commemorating the Mother's birth anniversary with a special talk by Dr. Robert McDermott entitled "Interpreting The Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in terms of Shakti and Sophia."

We also continue to commemorate the birth anniversaries of Sri Aurobindo and of other luminaries such as Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and CIF founder, Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, who each contributed to introducing Indian spirituality and culture to the West.

Also, approximately a dozen CIF members have been participating in an "Integral Study Group" led by Dr. Debashish Banerji focusing on two books: Dr. Chaudhuri's *Sri Aurobindo, Prophet of Life Divine*, and Sri Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga*. Several members of the SASP Lodi ashram group join the class via internet, along with a few students from the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) where the study group is held.

CIF, 2650 Fulton St., San Francisco, CA 94118; www.culturalintegrationfellowship.org; (415) 668-1559.



AV almanac

The Galaxy re-visited

edited by Alan

From the November 2017 issue of Auroville Today.

Anu Majumdar, in her new book, Auroville A City for the Future, argues that the Galaxy concept is central to the manifestation of Auroville but it has been neglected or dismissed over the years.

Is the Galaxy still relevant? If so, what can we learn from looking at it afresh? Why has it taken so long for it to be materialised, and what can be done to change this?

Auroville Today brought together architects and town planners who have explored the concept to answer these questions. Helmut, David, Ganesh and Tejaswini are architects. Anupama, an architect, worked extensively with Roger Anger, whose team designed the Galaxy concept and whom Mother appointed Chief Architect of the town. Christian is a professional town planner. Anu, like Tejaswini, is a newly appointed member of the recently formed Town Development Council Interface group.

Auroville Today: Does the Galaxy have much to teach us? For example, regarding density, how successfully does the Galaxy deal with fitting 50,000 people into such a small area?

Helmut: I don't think there is a density problem here, unless you compress too much in certain areas. Moreover, the confined size of this city encourages pedestrians because the distances are very walkable.

Anupama: I think mobility is the key thing. Originally, Roger wanted to spread the city because he didn't want a dense city where there would be no room for nature. However, The Mother insisted that it should be more compact. So Roger introduced the Lines of Force because he didn't want to compromise the green of the rest of the city, and he wanted the mobility to be predominately pedestrian. You do not see roads on the Galaxy plan, and this is deliberate. Even the Crown is not a road but a cluster of buildings within which you can circulate the city's facilities on foot.

However, the Auroville planning office took this plan and converted it into very conventional road sections. This is a type of city that will attract motorised traffic.

Helmut: Roads and streets are usually the forerunners of development. But they do not have to be designated for motorised traffic. We have no proper mobility concept for

the city. This is a serious set-back; we might get overrun by motorised traffic with all the fatal consequences for city life.

When we have a very complicated plan like the Galaxy, we need a new kind of development logic to build the town. If we don't have this, we will fall back on old models, which is what is happening at present – uncontrolled random development. The Galaxy will not get realised this way.

Ganesh: It is important that we change our perspective. In the Dreamcatchers [architects, planners and interested Aurovilians who met to explore innovative ways to realise the city eds.], we tried to look at the Galaxy afresh. For example we asked, do we need roads? If you begin with a question like that, it doesn't mean that you don't make them, but it will lead you somewhere else than if you assume that roads are necessary.

Again, when you look at the Galaxy model from above you wonder what it would be like to stand between the high buildings. But if you look from ground level, you do not get that feeling. So we have to keep looking at the same thing from different angles. This will give us new clues.

Anupama: Roger's Paris office thought the only way mobility can work in such a sunny, humid and rainy climate is if there are many covered walkways. So many of the structures which look massive from above are covered walkways, and everything is joined up to enable people to walk everywhere in the shade. Roger also created one-storey walkways so that when you walked there, you are not overawed by the height of surrounding buildings.

If you look at the Galaxy as an urban form without roads, it is a very fluid space which, frankly, nobody has explored. I should clarify that, according to Roger, the radicals are not roads but infrastructure paths.

Anu: For me, the Crown is one of the key elements in mobility. Unless we achieve here a quiet pedestrian circulation, we are not allowing everything else to emerge. It's not about being strict regarding geometry but getting a clean flow of energies to circulate.

David: Actually, Roger was shocked when I described to him how native English speakers understand the word 'road'.

Anupama: He was very concerned at plans to make the width of the Crown road, including pedestrians and cyclists, add up to 24 metres. He wanted the maximum width to be six metres, and within buildings much less, because otherwise the intimacy would be lost. He actually took one of the planning team out one morning with a measuring tape to make his point. Unfortunately, they still resisted changing their plans.

David: We are still building according to a density plan that someone in Aurofuture made more than 20 years ago.



Tejaswini: Today, what I feel is missing is the human scale, particularly if I look at the Crown and the first radial. The Crown design encourages speeds of up to 50 km speed in the city, even though we are talking about a pedestrian city with a maximum speed of about 10 kilometres an hour.

Christian: We are creating a city for the car, exactly what we wanted to avoid. This is the first obvious fact I saw when I came here.

Helmut: The outer ring road is there to take the pressure from the city. It is for faster traffic which wants to go from one zone to another. There should be no motorised traffic on the Crown, except for public transport and emergencies.

Auroville Today: So there is agreement that the Galaxy plan has much to offer us?

David: It's a no-brainer, it's obvious.

Auroville Today: Then why has it taken so long to manifest?

David: This is why I am getting so angry. I have sat for over 20 years in meetings like this with very intelligent people having similar conversations. I can tick almost everything that everybody here has said. But why are we still sitting here? It is because certain far-reaching planning decisions have been made by imbeciles, and anyone stepping in later to try and help has started with a ball-and-chain around their ankles.

In Dreamcatchers, we spent years discussing fundamental issues of planning. But every time we presented something to these people, we hit a blank wall. So, unless we deal with the politics of planning in Auroville, with the fear and the power driving decisions here, we will be sitting here in ten years having the same conversation and nothing will have changed.

Christian: I fully agree. I chose to step out of the Master Plan process because I realised nothing can be done at present to change things.

Anupama: The Galaxy plan is a solution to the problems the rapidly-urbanising world is facing if it was only recognised. But those who until recently managed planning in Auroville have no understanding of this, and they keep taking decisions without reference to the larger plan.

David: Decisions with profound implications have been made by people with an extreme dearth of imagination. Clearly, if people like that demand the right to determine the parameters of the Galaxy, they can't manage it. I couldn't do it, either. The only chance of this manifesting is if all of us brainstorm and work together. If you put this in the hands of people who haven't got any idea, the only thing they can do is lay down infrastructure, like roads and pipes, which is what is happening at present. Basically, Auroville is being designed by engineers.

Anupama: We have always empowered people who knew less to be at the top of the planning pyramid. Many people wondered why Roger was working with these people. I asked him and he said, The Mother told me to do my work and the rest will be done, and I deal with these people because they are the ones there now. He felt when Auroville is ready, the situation will change.

The planning office has never encouraged different studies of the Galaxy to be made. We have had problems hiring outside consultants because the Galaxy plan has been so hotly contested in Auroville. If we wanted to make further studies ourselves, we were called 'fanatics' or people thought we were trying to take over the project.

Planning is a series of negotiations and explorations but in Auroville there were these two 'religions', the pro-Galaxy and the anti-Galaxy religion, and wherever you went you were bombarded by one side or the other.

But I continue to work on it and keep putting life into it because it is worth it: I learned so much more by talking to Roger and going through his archive and works in France.

Anu: For so long, negativity against the city and Roger has been so strong that nobody could deal with the Galaxy, except through building infrastructure. There are still many closed minds. We need a mind shift to be able to see the realization of the Galaxy not as ordinary 'development' but as steps enabling a unified and far-reaching experiment.

Auroville Today: Key aspects of the Galaxy are contained in the recently published Terms of Reference for planning in Auroville. Doesn't this suggest that the Galaxy concept is far from dead?

Anupama: The Terms of Reference have included elements of the Galaxy plan as a compromise, but the fact the Galaxy represents an entirely different form of city, and therefore a different form of mobility, is not penetrating.

Tejaswini: Fortunately, I have not come across anybody who is actually anti-Galaxy. So I think we should talk less about these divisions and more about how we can take it forward. The Galaxy is a given; there's no debate about that. All that is debatable is different interpretations.

Anupama: I don't think we can wish away an actual situation of duality. Why do we have this situation? I think what happened was that Mother used to meet Roger daily about the city but in those days there were no reports of these conversations. So people working on the land in Auroville were seeing Roger as wanting to impose something alien upon them, and they resisted.

Helmut: These kinds of controversies happen everywhere in the world with development projects. We are not



an exception. Information and participation in the planning process are the best way to deal with it: imposition will always fail.

Auroville Today: But certain strong reservations about the Galaxy have persisted. One is that it does not consider ground realities like topography and the prevailing social situation. Another is that it represents the consciousness of another era when there was abundant fossil energy, and architects felt free to manipulate the landscape to fulfill their dreams, as in Brasília and Chandigarh. These people say we need to be building a different kind of city from the Galaxy today if we are to be the 'city the world needs'.

Helmut: I agree that the Galaxy concept is not adapted to ground realities. This has to happen, we only have to start doing it. I don't see this as a problem.

Anupama: The problem with Modernism in town planning, which Roger very well understood, is that Modernism got somehow linked with 'motorism'. Brasília and Chandigarh are all about motorisation. Roger's approach was actually a counterpoint to the Le Corbusier's. Although he admired his artistic genius, he was very sad when he saw Chandigarh because of this aspect.

What Roger planned here was very different, although the Aurovilians still don't see it. Roger was compacting the city to enable alternative forms of mobility.

Christian: The architecture of the Galaxy was popular in the 1970s and 1980s but it has been proven to have many drawbacks, including the creation of spaces difficult to supervise, leading to all kinds of anti-social behaviour. You have to listen to the experience of other cities because these kinds of forms are clearly dated. But this doesn't mean we should reject the Galaxy concept as it has some very interesting elements. We just have to find different ways of materialising it.

Anupama: Roger said that cities keep changing over time. Auroville's plan is no exception. But he wanted there to be some organising principle.

Christian: To build a city you have to provide the bones, then the flesh can be organised around them. Unfortunately, the way the Auroville planners have translated the bones is as roads. This is clearly nonsense.

I love the structure of the Galaxy but for me, as a town planner, there are other important considerations. At present, each human needs half an acre to feed and accommodate them. If you make this calculation, you will see that for today's 2,500 residents plus guests, the surface of the Master Plan area is exactly sufficient. But if you put 50,000 people here, you will need a much bigger area to sustain it. We are focusing on the city as an artistic object but it doesn't

exist on its own. We need to see how it relates to the larger bioregion in terms of circulation and economy.

Anu: We have to see the totality. The complete Galaxy plan for me includes the greenbelt. Until now, most of our greenbelt is forestry, there is very little farmland. We need additional farms to bring more self-sufficiency in food.

Tejaswini: We should not forget, when we talk about 'ground realities', that there is still much land that we do not own. Consequently, what is happening now is we are constructing bits and pieces of the Crown, and little bits of a radial here and there. I think we are forcing ourselves to do a few elements of the Galaxy, but this doesn't make sense. Galaxy elements should not be implemented without looking at the present situation of the land and the present needs of the population.

David: I think the fact that we don't own all the land is a huge blessing. It allows us the time to finally get our act together, and start manifesting what I believe Mother really saw when she looked at this Galaxy plan.

Tejaswini: I don't agree that not owning all the land is a blessing. Ownership of the land is very important for the success of the Auroville experiment. We cannot ignore that today private developers want to make developments in the city area without any reference to the Auroville spirit.

Ganesh: As designers and planners we always try to simplify the project to its true essence. But the trick is to simplify it without losing its spirit and perhaps we have over-simplified the Galaxy concept too much.

Also, we should realise that while we are discussing the rich potential of the Galaxy, what we are actually building today might be very different, and the more this happens, the more the Galaxy gets diminished. So what can we do? Maybe something like this. If somebody asks me to design a building, as an architect I have the usual list of priorities in my head, and they are all valid. But if we are constructing something in the Galaxy area, I think we should add into this mix an understanding of the 'matrix' that unifies all this. Then, when we design something today, it can fit with what another architect designs 100 years later. For me, this is the most pressing need, because I think that by not considering the overall concept we might be going against it, even without realising it.

Helmut: We have all done this. As architects, we do not want to just drop our buildings on to the land without an awareness of the larger whole, but so far that is often what we have been forced to do.

Auroville Today: How flexible is this Galaxy matrix? For example, could trees be substituted in some places for buildings?



Ganesh: It's very possible. I see the Galaxy not as a town but as one singular building, a large house. If you are given a part to do, you try your best to satisfy what the project demands of you there. At the same time, you try and decode the Galaxy with your own interpretation of it, with your own choice of materials. So, yes, perhaps you could put a row of trees to represent something of the design. It's a question of creativity, trying to understand what it can be and doing your best to contribute to the matrix.

David: The Chief Architect was effectively holding the matrix we are talking about.

Christian: A city is like a body, it has to keep renewing itself while growing.

Anupama: Roger was always trying to keep it flexible. People were asking for byelaws to help design the town, but he said if I give byelaws, will it help? Look at all the cities with byelaws, do they always ensure good cities? He was aiming for something higher than that. But that flexibility can be misused by others and become the lowest level. To a certain extent, this is what is happening today.

David: The most interesting thing I found in presenting Crownways was there was a lot of positive feedback from across-the-board in Auroville. Greenbelters came up to me and said, I've spent my whole life resisting the Galaxy but if it would be anything like that, I'd be in favour. I believe that what I was really presenting was a set of values which people could connect to, weaving together environmental aspects, mobility, everything. We have to present the Galaxy with all these levels, with all these layers of meaning, so that people can connect to it. Without this, the Galaxy concept is too abstract even for many architects to get their heads around.

Auroville Today: In 1972, Roger said the city should be at the service of people who live there. It should not be constructed first and then occupied but, "The inhabitants will define the needs of the city by experiencing them". What do you understand by this?

Christian: With very few exceptions, cities are not built before being inhabited, and all those have failed. Cities evolve at the crossing point of two kinds of energies. One is vision, planification – the vertical axis – and the other, – the horizontal axis—is the energy of life, of those who come there to gather and create opportunities. If a city is just planned, it is dead: if it grows just through the energy of the inhabitants, it spreads haphazardly, like a cancer.

Beautiful cities emerge from a negotiation between the two axes; this is where we are failing at present. If you have a vision and construct it like a beautiful piece of art, it can take centuries to make it into a living place. You can never make a city without incorporating the energy of the citizens.

Auroville Today: Two things I conclude from today's discussion. One is there is so much more to discover about the Galaxy that most people do not know about, so there's a huge need to communicate this.

David: I think Anupama has made a very important point, which is that many have not seen what she has seen in the Galaxy. This is a consequence of her conversations with Roger. But why didn't Roger put everything on the table so we could all understand the Galaxy better?

Anupama: He did what he could, but many of his papers and drawings regularly disappeared from Aurofuture.

Auroville Today: The other thing is the political dimension. It seems that many of the proposals put forward in the past, as well as requests for further studies, have been blocked by people who do not understand the Galaxy. I would like to ask Anu and Tejaswini, as members of the new TDC/Interface group, if they see this group offering a way forward, both in terms of increasing communication and knowledge and in dealing with the political dimension?

Tejaswini: Definitely, yes. Past planning groups ended up doing a lot of fire fighting but now there is a shift in the whole structure. We are supposed to initiate a lot of technical planning work so, hopefully, there is a space where all the work we have talked about around this table is going to be plugged in.

Anu: I think one of the good things is that now there is a focus upon a general detailed development plan for the whole town. This is an opportunity not to be missed.

Anupama: You shouldn't be sucked into fire fighting, you should focus on the big unifying things. But it has to go together with communication with the community. You have to help it get over its fears, hang-ups and misconceptions about the envisioned plan and to look at it afresh. In any city, planning is a series of negotiations, so Auroville needs a body that facilitates this process and heals past divisions.

Christian: Communication and education is the most important thing you can do. Don't leave planning to the technocrats; they will just make one more city like anywhere else.

David: If Auroville can truly be open in the sense that the poetry of life has a place at the planning table, we will have done it; we will have succeeded.

Anu: I'm really surprised by the feedback I'm getting concerning what I was expressing about the Galaxy, among other things, in my book. People are very open to it; it's almost as if I have voiced something that was inside them. So I feel we may be entering a new phase, a new beginning.



Salon

Mind, master of the house

by Richard Pearson

This is what the mind makes us believe. For “I think, therefore I am.” Although it may have seemed true in the past, yet now a new awareness awakens as we prepare for this new influence, the Supramental, to consciously guide us and enter our thoughts, our feelings and our action.

At present many of mind’s decisions are overruled by the despotic vital; we are urged on by emotions, sentiments and feelings; and finally more often than not, it is desire that steps in to dictate our action. Where is the ‘house’ in this imposed siege, the body’s real need to offer itself in simple love serving the Mother in all it does and thus become the instrument surrendered more and more to Her? Quite naturally our being needs to be put in order in all its parts, in each nook and corner. We can then step ever forward on the sunlit path laid out by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, opening ourselves more and still more to the Supramental Light and Force and Consciousness already established here on earth.

First let us grow conscious of our mental activities, observing our thoughts as a witness, not as our own. We begin to know the mind as separate from the indwelling consciousness. This is a necessary first step. To go within, to live within even in the midst of our daily life. Besides, there are tips of practical advice from the Mother to guide us: for instance, living in the present and not thinking unnecessarily beforehand or lingering on afterwards, brooding over what is passed and gone, which is unnecessary and truly a quite tiring mechanical affair. Even in well-developed minds there is also the danger of being too organized, for as the Mother writes: “Sri Aurobindo’s answer is always the same. Be simple, be simple, very simple. And I know what he means: to deny entry to regulating, organizing, prescriptive, judgmental thought, he wants none of that. What he calls simple is a joyful spontaneity; in action, in expression, in movement, in life, be simple, be simple, be simple. A joyful spontaneity.” In the Mother’s Prayers we find an echo of the same advice: “As soon as all effort disappears from a manifestation, it becomes very simple, with the simplicity of a flower opening and manifesting its fragrance without clamour or vehement gesture. And in this simplicity lies the greatest power, the power that is least mixed and least gives rise to harmful reactions...” (*Prayers and Meditations*, February 12, 1912) Evidently in this prayer

the Mother writes about the power of the vital which equally needs to be purified to do any work truly well.

“It is in perfect mental immobility that the aspiration is most ardent, like a flame that rises straight up without a puff of air to make it waver.” (*En Route, the Mother’s correspondence with Shyam Sundar*: p. 92) Having achieved this state, be it only partially, let us turn reverently to the Katha Upanishad and contemplate on the third, fourth, ninth and tenth slokas in the third chapter of the first cycle. The key is offered to open our understanding to the truth of the matter:

Know the body for the chariot and the soul for the master of the chariot: know Reason for the charioteer and the mind for the reins only.

The senses they speak of as the steeds and the objects of sense as the paths in which they move, and One yoked with Self and the mind and the senses is the enjoyer, say the thinkers.

That man who uses the mind for reins and the knowledge for the driver, reaches the end of his road, the highest seat of Vishnu.

Than the senses the objects of sense are higher; and higher than the objects of sense is the Mind; and higher than the Mind is the faculty of knowledge; and than that is the Great Self higher. (CWSA, Vol. 18, pp. 114-115)

I feel that a positive control of the mind means to make it silent. This does not happen in a day, it requires assiduous practice and determination. To begin with we have to master our thought, and this is achieved by the four-fold method mentioned by the Mother in her *Commentaries on the Dhammapada*: to observe the thoughts as a disinterested spectator; then to watch over them, distinguishing their nature, such as memories, emotions, sensations or ideas, a sort of screening process. After that, control of entry by putting a severe policeman or a firm white angel, denying entrance to unwanted thoughts or evil intentions in imagination. For “If a man speaks or acts with an evil mind, suffering follows him as the wheel follows the hoof of the bullock that pulls the cart.” (CWM, Vol. 3, p. 183)

Finally there comes mastery of the thought. All that, says the Mother, is to get rid of a bad mind; for one who acts or speaks with a bad mind is followed by suffering as closely as the plough follows the bullock tilling the earth! And this is the ‘*contre-partie*’—to quote the Dhammapada: “If a man speaks or acts with a purified mind, happiness accompanies him as closely as his inseparable shadow (CWM, Vol. 3, p. 184).



Chronicles

The First Nations and the soul of America

Part 3: The necessity and gifts of collective grief

by Karen Mitchell

Don't mourn. Organize.

—Seen on a bumper sticker shortly after the 2016 US national elections

To truly and freely grieve as an entire people can revive an entire culture just as much as it can bring back to life an individual.

—Martín Prechtel¹

Introduction

Some time after the events of 9/11, the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum said we Americans had missed an opportunity by avoiding collective mourning. She believed, had we gone through a process of collective grieving, it would have opened us up as a Nation to a deeper and much needed wisdom.

In the aftermath of 9/11 our leaders, rather than setting an example of grieving, quickly framed the events of 9/11 as the opening salvo of a determined aggressor. The war drums started beating and they played the patriot card once again. Those pulling the strings fanned our fear and anger succeeding in derailing us from the grieving process, or at least minimized it. Our representatives, with very few exceptions, jumped on that bandwagon afraid perhaps to be viewed as “unpatriotic.” The general population, for the same reason, also felt impelled to go to war—not everyone, however. There



were many protests across the country. My husband and I were part of one in San Francisco. At the time, it seemed an important and necessary thing to do. Now, with some hindsight, I see that the most essential process did not happen. We did not collectively grieve our loss of a sense of invulnerability and unassailability as a Nation. This would have been a good beginning.

In her book, *Notes on a foreign country: An American abroad in a post-American world*, Suzy Hansen wrote this:

Only a few years after September 11, we had in fact become less introspective. The compassionate efforts to understand our new, uncertain world were replaced by an ever more certain set of ways to manage it.²

One way of “managing” our new world involved more consumerism. I remember our president advising us to go out and shop! Continuing with our consumer lifestyle would prove to our enemies that they were incapable of disrupting and disturbing our National life! I translate this as: “No one can make us grieve.” Hansen links the failure to become or remain introspective to the increasing madness and mania of Wall Street afterwards and to the national lack of interest in the wars

going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. I also see it linked to the conditions and forces that propelled our current president to the White House.

In this third part of the series, “The First Nations and the soul of America,” we will be exploring grief: its necessity—both individual and collective—its process, its fruits, and how it has more recently been manifesting in America. This article will be an interweaving of different perspectives: personal, integral yogic, as presented poetically in *Savitri*; and indigenous, as represented in the work of Martín Prechtel.

Martín grew up on a Pueblo reservation in New Mexico, the son of a mother who belonged to a First Nation of Canada and a white father. Grief and heartbreak, following the break-up of a marriage and the death of his mother, drove him to wander through Mexico and into Guatemala. In Guatemala, in a Mayan village, he found his home. He learned the language, married a Guatemalan woman, had three sons, and was apprenticed to the local shaman. In the Mayan village Martín was taught how to grieve and why grieving was both a necessary and powerful expression of connection. He also learned it was inseparable from praise, love, and beauty, particularly beauty in the spoken word. Martín experienced other huge losses both personal and collective while in Guatemala including the death of a son from typhoid, and a civil war which undermined his adopted Mayan culture and drove him out of his home. Now, Martín is living and teaching in New Mexico. He describes himself as someone helping people re-connect with their “indigenous souls.”

Stories of grief

When I was working as a counselor in a mental health crisis clinic, a



woman came in who shared with me how depressed she was feeling. As I listened and asked her questions, I discovered her “depression” had begun not long after her husband’s death nearly ten years previous and had continued practically unabated since that time. I realized her depression was tied to her experience of loss. A very striking picture came to mind: that of a very frightened woman desperately and determinedly clinging to a small bush above a flowing river not wanting to drop in. All her strength and energy was going into clinging to that bush and resisting the plunge. The woman assumed, as do most of us, that the river was the unending and uncontrollable experience of loss. However, the river itself, was not grief, it was Life. It was the dropping in, the plunge, that was the grief. Grief is a new form of coming into Life—one beyond our control and our imagining, one that invites and needs our trust and surrender.

This is something I had watched a good friend learn when we both were in our twenties and living in a Catholic monastery. We had been high school friends drawn to each other when we saw each other every morning at mass in the school chapel. We were among the handful that showed up on a regular basis. After we had been in the monastery about five years, my friend began to experience a great deal of pain. Later she would be diagnosed as having a very fast-spreading form of bone cancer. It began in her spine where it rapidly travelled to her brain. Within three to four months she was in a coma and in another two months she was dead.

For weeks, maybe months previous to her diagnosis, my friend had been experiencing mounting pain that she did not tell anyone about. In her young mind, it would have been

complaining. My friend had a wide, great soul that was drawn to being heroic—qualities none of us had seen the depth of before her illness. After some time living with this pain, she could not hide it any more, nor could she stay on top of it. The pain was completely overwhelming and consuming her. The heroic stance, which in the mind of my friend at that time seemed the sole expression of her soul’s greatness, was impossible to maintain. This was a greater loss to her than her physical life. At some point though she acknowledged and accepted the seeming loss of any hope of personal heroism and therefore greatness. She let go and took such a deep plunge into Life that afterwards she would sing in her hospital bed when any easement of her pain allowed her to. She also felt deeply connected to the migrant workers who came to the USA from Mexico and their families and offered herself to God to help them. In the in-between place of her coma, her spirit came to me, communicating how in this musical cosmos of ours, she was moving to a higher octave, but we would always remain in harmony.

We typically do not think of the experience of loss and grief as having such a completely inward dimension, but the loss and falling away of self-ideas, self-directedness, self-feeling, and self-energy is experienced in all forms of loss. This also applies to a Nation’s experiences of loss.

Within a year of my friend’s death, I started experiencing an upwelling of energy that frightened me. I tried figuring out what it was. I read the limited mystical/contemplative literature that was available to me and never came across a description of anything similar. The struggle to stay on top of and control this energy completely exhausted my mind and body. This went on for months. I reached the point

where I absolutely knew that I could not bear it anymore. At that moment I heard an inner voice: If everything is God, this too is God, so what are you afraid of? I surrendered then in complete trust to the movement of energy and the first thing that happened was I started to grieve. In the beginning I was grieving for things of a personal nature, but then the grieving seemed to open up and I was grieving for things beyond my knowing. Later, I did not know who was grieving. During this time my awareness naturally went into my belly because a noticeable softening was taking place there. After this grieving came a period of rapture. I felt the energy carrying me upwards. As the days went by, I had a different more mental impression of rising, of bursting into light—the light of awareness—the awareness of my own awareness.

When I was in my late forties, I witnessed and listened to the intense grief of a very dear friend who had lost her significant other. Her loss had been made intensely poignant, because her significant other had become so transparent and loving in his last weeks. He had let go of all the “stuff” that had gotten in the way of his fully being with her. My friend surrendered herself to grief, allowed herself to know and experience his loss on many levels. During that first year or so after her significant other’s passing, he came to her through dream and vision giving her a taste of the “other world.” These encounters did not lessen her grief, they intensified it. She felt and grieved their separation more keenly and now she also grieved the loss of the “other world.” After about a year of this my friend woke to the power and primacy of awareness and began speaking of it. Somewhat later she also woke to the vastness and wideness of her soul and began to sense her unique work in this world.



Why Run From Your Mother

In Grief's embrace
you become weighty enough to
fall,
to plunge deep into the roiling,
rollicking, River of All.
Those powerful, clear, life-giving
waters
work for you
teach you without words—
by simply carrying you.

Those waters remove burdens,
eventually make you so light
that Grief, our Ancient Mother
can easily lift you up in Her worn
and aged hands
as Her Love offering
to the First Light.

Grief and finding our soul

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo speaks of grief with poignant eloquence especially in Book Seven: The Book of Yoga. Sri Aurobindo focusses on how grieving, the allowing of the full experience of loss, is connected to self-realization and self-remembering. The book begins with Savitri's return to Satyavan from her parent's home, where she learns Satyavan would be dead in a year's time. As with many of us, Savitri's yogic journey begins with a profound experience of loss and grief.

A dire expectancy knocked at her
breast;
Dreadful to her were the footsteps
of the hours:
Grief came, a passionate stranger
to her gate...³

Grief often begins as an intense emotional state. For Savitri it is fear. Grief is like a "passionate stranger to her gate." A "passionate stranger" is

someone unpredictable, unknown, someone that can possibly upend life, or self as one has known them.

Savitri goes through very relatable experiences of loneliness and of feeling a void opening up in the midst of her life. She feels apart from the ordinary round though she tries to keep up the appearances of normality. At some point, she decides to try and avoid grief all together. "Vainly she fled into abysses of bliss." She wants Satyavan more than ever:

After all was given she demanded
still;
Even by his strong embrace unsatisfied,
She longed to cry, "O tender Satyavan,
O lover of my soul, give more, give more..."⁴

Confronted by Satyavan's impending death, Savitri attaches herself to him more fiercely. She even has a fleeting idea of throwing herself on his funeral pyre. She has been overcome by grief, she has tried to avoid it, and now she is fanning its flames. All this has created more anguish.

In Canto II, Savitri, in the midst of her suffering, receives "a summons from her being's summit."

'Why camest thou to this dumb
deathbound earth,
This ignorant life beneath indif-
ferent skies
Tied like a sacrifice on the altar
of Time,
O spirit, O immortal energy,
If 'twas to nurse grief in a helpless
heart
Or with hard tearless eyes awaits
thy doom?
Arise, O soul, and vanquish Time
and Death.'⁵

The whole arc and meaning of Savitri's Yoga, of her destiny is conveyed by these words. The question beginning with, "Why camest Thou..." draws Savitri inward and begins to loosen her strong, emotional attachment to Satyavan. That attachment had begun to define and circumscribe her. The voice from her summit, tells her she is so much larger than any earthly experience can contain or express, larger than any attachment, larger than the experience of the most profound loss. The voice from her being's summit shows its power by being able to be heard in the midst of Savitri's most profound loss. It tells her that in the midst of loss, she can remember who she is and why she has come to earth.

The yoga of Savitri is not about overcoming grief; it is about the overcoming of loss itself. As long as loss exists for us, grief must too. Savitri's destiny is not to vanquish grief, but Time and Death. Grief will naturally and fully end when they do.

Savitri answers the Voice from her summit and surrenders herself:

'I am thy portion here charged
with thy work,
As thou myself seated for ever
above,
Speak to my depths, O great and
deathless Voice,
Command, for I am here to do thy
will.'⁶

Savitri sees that her profound loss is borne by only a "portion" of herself. There is another part of her that is "ever above." She asks this latter part to speak to her depths. I believe by "depths" is meant her physical and vital, all of her earthly nature. In true grief, as we begin to allow ourselves the experience of loss, of detachment, even our earthly nature can experience



being summoned by the “ever above,” self. With Savitri’s complete surrender comes guidance:

‘Remember why thou cam’st:
Find out thy soul, recover thy hid
self,
In silence see God’s meaning in
thy depths,
Then mortal nature change to the
divine...’⁷

Savitri is told to recover her hid self, to move inward. Silence will be the means for this. Paradoxically, this inward journey widens Savitri and places her at the heart of the human collective. She sees and feels the human struggle and has a clearer perception of human history and destiny. She feels “all the world’s possibilities in man.” Already “a portion of the mighty Mother,” has come into Savitri as if into “its own human part.” Surrender within the experience of loss is the presence of a portion of the Mother.

In Canto III, Savitri, grieving and now in search for her soul, enters more deeply into a protective silence. She quickly moves past “the wild Beast’s ramp and romp with Beauty and Life,” disordered comfort that mixes high and low. She also moves past the illusory security and reassurances of the “ended search, Truth’s rounded outcome firm, immutable.” She will not settle for dogmatic certitudes. She intuitively knows that the unsummoned vital and mind are incapable of bringing her to her soul or of providing true responses to her grief. At the end of Canto III, Savitri is encouraged to:

Follow the world’s winding high-
way to its source.
There in the silence few have ever
reached,
Thou shalt see the Fire burning
on the bare stone

And the deep cavern of thy secret
soul.⁸

In Canto IV, Savitri, now past all derailments of her search for soul, meets the Mother in three forms, which Savitri is told are her “secret soul.” All of them are centered on responding to the grief of all beings. The first is pure compassion, a full feeling of the suffering of all beings. After she speaks there is “an echo from below.” This is a voice of wrath and rebellion, a voice that speaks of his torture and slavery, the pitilessness he experiences and that lies in his own breast. After hearing this voice, Savitri recognizes that the form of the Mother in her pure compassion is only a “portion” of her own soul. As I tried to feel my way into that word, “portion,” which has come up earlier, an example came to me. There is a mother cooking dinner for her child, but the child is hungry and crying. While she is still engaged and attentive to the cooking which will completely satisfy her child, the mother sends a portion of her presence and attention to her child to comfort him or her in the interim. Savitri recognizes through hearing the Voice from below, the Voice from her own still unsatisfied and tormented depths, that she is not yet seeing her whole soul, but only a portion. She knows that it is only through her whole soul, that a completely satisfying response to grief, her own and every other being’s, will come. She must find the place where her whole soul is cooking.

A similar dynamic plays out twice more as Savitri sees and hears the Mother of Might who offers strength to the suffering and embattled, and the Mother of clear and crystal light who helps the grieving through inspiration, revelation and dreams. The echoes from the “spaces of the mind”

and from the “sense-shackled mind,” tell Savitri that loss, though mitigated, still exists, that Time and Death remain unvanquished. Throughout Canto IV we see Savitri listening not only to her summit, but to her depths. She knows nearness to Truth needs to be gauged by the whole of her being. When she finds torment and suffering in her depths, she doesn’t despair; she sees their existence as a sign that she has not yet fully entered the Truth of her being. When all the suffering and grief she carries inside find a complete and satisfying response, then she will know she has arrived. I believe this stance towards her own pain, frees up the energy formerly locked up in it and allows Savitri to take it up and use it to impel her onward in her Yoga.

On Savitri goes in search of her soul in Canto V. In this Canto, her compassion, strength, and inspiration begin to fall away as if overshadowed by something greater. Savitri comes to a “simple purity of emptiness” and unknowableness. Desire drops from her, even the desire to end suffering and grief which she saw as her expression of spiritual greatness. Eventually, as her search continued:

A sealed identity within her woke;
She knew herself the Beloved of
the Supreme:
These Gods and Goddesses were
he and she...⁹

Something is unblocked in Savitri and she begins to remember and enter into who she is. She is much more than could ever be contained or expressed through earthly grief and loss. These are not absolutes.

A being stood immortal in transi-
ence,
Deathless dallying with momen-
tary things,



In whose wide eyes of tranquil
happiness
Which pity and sorrow could not
abrogate...
She had come into the mortal
body's room
To play at ball with Time and Cir-
cumstance.
A joy in the world her master
movement here,
The passion of the game lighted
her eyes:
A smile on her lips welcomed
earth's bliss and grief,
A laugh was her return to pleasure
and pain.¹⁰

These five cantos show an arc of grief within an individual soul and conceivably in the soul of a Nation. That arc begins with an initial state of being overcome, nursing, or avoiding grief, continues with a moving inward in answer to the summons from the summit of our being, and ends with the capacity to welcome grief with a smile. Savitri's journey continues on, but we will stop here with her finding her soul. What have we learned?

The experience of loss is something our immortal souls use to summon us to find them. If we listen and surrender to that Voice from the summit of our being, the experience of loss will turn us inward, widen us, help us bring more compassion, strength, and light to the world, and impel us towards the full conscious meeting with our souls and destiny. It is within the experience of loss, personal or collective, that this Voice from our summits often comes to us the most clearly, powerfully and compellingly.

Grief in the indigenous view

In order for the dead person's traveling soul to reach the opposite shore to be initiated and transformed into a life-

giving force from a human spirit, all their living relatives have to show how deeply they feel the loss of the deceased in a real and honest show of grief... The distance to the Other Shores cannot be calculated by normal human methods, its distance being more akin to something galactic, so arrival over this ocean of time is not something the deceased's soul can ever accomplish unassisted.

—Martín Prechtel¹¹

I was writing out this quote from Martín Prechtel by longhand, when suddenly and simultaneously there was a strong feeling-impression and a sense of presence. The feeling-impression was this: the human being, Stephen Paddock, known as the “Vegas shooter,” had been terrified of dying ungrieved and unloved. Was he gambling then on sneaking in somehow and riding the waves of love and grief that would accompany his victims?

We, living in the modern world, tend to think of sorrow and grief as only experiences of personal emotion we must go through following loss. For at least some indigenous people, grieving was collective power. It gave their dead loved one the canoe, the wind, and the oars they needed to make the great crossing. Only then would they become ancestors. When those dead, who had made the crossing and had become ancestors looked back on the living, it was as a life-giving, natural force. This power of grief and love among the living, and the power of those dead who become ancestors, is the power of our connection with one another.

Within many indigenous cultures, those dead unable to go to the “other shore” because they are inadequately grieved, return as “ghosts” and will seek food and shelter like a spiritual refugee. They can only look back at the past and not move forward. Their

presence creates fear which enters the body typically of an immediate family member or relative who is more sensitive and keeps that living family member from going forward. The unfortunate “host” becomes somebody always at odds with himself or herself and with everybody else, somebody who consequently becomes ill in mind, body, and soul.

Martín Prechtel, who learned from and was nourished by both Pueblo and Mayan cultures, wrote that within the indigenous soul was an acknowledgement that often the more troubled persons within their communities—those whose behavior negatively stood out—had taken upon themselves the unmetabolized grief inherited from the family's past. They did this so it would not greatly disturb or disrupt their relatives' lives. These self-sacrificing persons, often the most tender, were said by the Mayan people to drift “back under the water.”

Martin Prechtel adds this:

The more generous and conscious of the people knew that the entire group should somehow share the burden among them, but people are people, and most lived by the motto adhered to worldwide: better him than us.

It seems to me people of the big cities and countries of the modern world are just as deeply afflicted with this very syndrome.¹²

Yes, it is universal the “better him than us” syndrome, but unlike the indigenous people, the modern, mentalized individual does not recognize the gift the troubled, addicted, and outcast are giving to the rest of us. Instead we frequently heap blame upon them, see them as morally or psychologically inferior, and in this country are extraordinarily punitive towards them.



The Quakers have taken up this issue of punitiveness seeing the U.S. prison system as a “profound moral and spiritual crisis.” In a recent newsletter they reported that the U.S. has just 5% of the world’s population, but nearly 25% of the world’s prisoners and also utilizes solitary confinement more than most other nations. As a society we confront “offenders” with harshness, hardness and greed (privatized prisons are now big business). The more we collectively avoid experiencing grief, the less we can see the burden of grief others are carrying.

This aspect of indigenous wisdom is not entirely foreign even to the modern Western world. The Christ story, though progressively worked, layered and interpreted in increasingly mentalized and therefore separative ways, contains similar theme. Jesus is a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” He takes on all the human “guilt” (the ungrieved grief?) consciously and freely out of love.

Martín Prechtel wrote that grieving is a kind of metabolic process that takes time and the right cultural conditions. However, in war and in its aftermath there are too many sorrows and losses. Many of them remain ungrieved and are passed down for generations. One of the sorrows and losses of war is what Martín calls the experienced loss of the “intact soul.” This loss is felt by any individual who takes the life of another no matter what the circumstance, or destroys the landscape of a culture.

When these various ungrieved losses become a general “weight” in the population, because no family, no single human, soldier or civilian can possibly carry such collective weight, this weight takes on a personality so large and general that no longer is it

simply a matter of metabolizing the original losses of war with... natural grief. The losses are too extreme, too old, too confused, and they become very transmuted, heavy beyond their combined weight, too heavy for every day humans to handle. This ghost is enormous and becomes a permanent resident of the cultural mind. The entire culture carries it combined weight, and being born into it thinks it is all normal. This becomes very much like a kind of spiritual black hole...¹³

In the United States, the “ghosts” of grief are everywhere now, and the burden of ungrieved grief is heavy on us all. People run from silence and stillness as if knowing, if they should stop even for a moment, the grief will catch up with them. In the period between 2011–2014 close to 13% of people 12 and older said they had taken anti-depressants in the last month; 68% of those people had been on an anti-depressant for two years or more.¹⁴ Twenty million Americans abuse/over-use substances. Two million of those human beings abuse prescription pain killers and 500,000 people, heroin.¹⁵ Terrorist attacks and mass murder-suicide shootings are pummeling us into some form of collective grief as is the rise of extreme natural disasters. The nation as a whole is desperately clinging to a tiny bush, using its dwindling reserves of intelligence, energy, heroism and strength to keep itself from falling into the river. But this river is not the river of unending loss, it is the river of life, of renewal, of widening and transformation. We need to fall.

Learning to grieve

Blessed are the ones mourning...
—Gospel of Matthew¹⁶

*...then I must grieve and learn
that I possess by loss
the earth I live upon
and stand in and am....*

—Wendell Berry¹⁷

*...such silent tears such storms
that washed and pounded and
hurled out and up every single
thing
and left me standing with a song,
the long hush
of waves destroying and rising to
swallow up my life,
gave my voice a sing, and snapped
those chains...
My soul came forth...*

—Jimmy Santiago Baca¹⁸

It is very difficult for America to grieve. This may be because of our very strong collective identity as the first successful democratic, modern nation. Our difficulty may also be due to our relatively rootless, troubled and traumatic history and our particular character.

America sees itself as forward-looking, a creator of abundance and innovation, successful, powerful, materially secure, freedom-loving, protective of true democracy, innocent, good, and strongly self-identifying. Many qualities of this collective identity stand in a kind of natural opposition to the process of grief. The beginning stages of grief are not forward looking. They are about loss, not abundance. Success, power, and security evaporate or are rendered completely irrelevant during times of grieving. What happens from one moment to the next is largely not by choice—striking at the heart of our self-determination. Innocence and goodness become less assured possessions as we experience the tumult of emotions. Finally, the grief that follows surrender, becomes a letting go of self-identifying. We do



not make or maintain our identity, we find and discover it.

To make and maintain our American “brand” has required that we ignore, filter, and lie about history. Our real history is one of very tightly woven strands of trauma and success. Until fairly recently, historians told our story, and we heard it, as if there were huge empty spaces between our successes and the creation of trauma, when there were none. The trauma I am referring to, is both the trauma we have sustained, and even more notably, the trauma we have inflicted upon others—which has caused us to lose our “intact souls.” Grieving such losses would make it impossible to maintain our identity as an innocent and happily successful Nation. Grieving would also challenge the very nature of what we call growth and success.

Our avoidance of grief also stems from our character. We tend to be a driven, pragmatic, expansive, confident, heroic and generous people who think very well of ourselves—or think we ought to. Grief doesn’t fit in easily with these traits. Grief requires a stilling and quieting that feels unnatural. Our pragmatism is irked by a process it views as relatively unnecessary, messy, disorderly and useless. Grief can shake one’s confidence to its foundations, blow up one’s sense of superiority, or give one a sense of a new power for which there is no cognitive framework or “normal” outlet, etc.

Despite these very entrenched and huge impediments, we are slowly learning how to grieve. We are learning because our suffering is mounting. More of us white people are seeing and feeling what the “minorities” have seen and felt much more keenly and for a longer time: the tight, close relation between what we have nationally defined as success and traumatic experience.

We have new history tellers to-

day who tell our stories in a ways that invite and encourage grieving. Ken Burns’ and Lynn Novick’s ten episode series on the Vietnam War, is an honest and compassionate account that does this kind of inviting. Currently, I am reading the book of another historian: Edward E. Baptist. His story, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of Capitalism*,¹⁹ awakened me to this very tight relation between our success and traumatization of others. This book is another invitation to mourn.

When I looked for historical templates for a collective grieving process in America, what stood out for me was a movement that started during the Depression. It was a uniquely American movement and began with a group of alcoholics. It is called Alcoholics Anonymous. Many elements of a collective grief process are found in the AA community and the Twelve Steps. There is the public owning of the truth of one’s addiction, its costs, and one’s helplessness in the face of it. There is the acknowledgment that there is something greater than all of this: a “higher power.” There is also the call to surrender, the summons to a fearless moral inventory, and the willingness to make amends for the traumatic losses one has caused others. The AA community promotes a spirit of egalitarianism, keeps out economic and political considerations, and calls upon its members to give of themselves to other alcoholics. It is a well-protected, collective grief process that calls upon the positive traits of the American people.

Wolfgang J. Aurose (Schmidt-Reincke) and Soleil Aurose (Lithman) of our own Integral Yoga community have also created a process which can lay a supportive foundation for a larger collective grief process. Their Engaging with Soul of the Nation events

call upon the participants to find within themselves and fully engage with a dark aspect of their Nation. The two times I have done this have drawn me into an intense process of grief. The grief flowed into and became a widening of consciousness where I hold both dark and light, and where my individual soul and the National soul were experienced as a unity.

Art in the form of painting, theater, and monument design is also a way we as a Nation are invited to grieve. Grief and Beauty live in close relation. An example of art inviting grief is Maya Lin’s powerful design for the National Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C. Made of panels of reflective black granite bearing the names of the over 58,000 Americans who died in Vietnam, and set within and held by Earth, it appears as a planetary wound we are all part of. It is now considered a sacred place and receives 20 million visitors a year. The memorial invites remembrance, grief and connection. My husband and I have been there and can attest to the power of the place.

Minority communities in America are pioneering new ways of grieving or reconnecting with older, indigenous ways of grieving and healing. The following quote is from the preface to a book by David W. McIvor about the Black Lives Matter movement:

The Black Lives Matter protests and the repeated instances of death and disregard that have continued to motivate them imply that we face less a ‘moment’ of grief than an enduring situation of loss, pain, and vulnerability—a situation that has not been adequately faced by public institutions or ordinary citizens. For Claudia Rankine....the Black Lives Matter protests represent nothing less than “an attempt to



keep mourning an open dynamic in our culture.”²⁰

McIvor very perceptively added a little later in his book that mourning in America is less about getting past traumatic experiences, and more about an “ongoing democratic labor of recognition and repair.” McIvor sees collective grief not just as a process of putting trauma behind us, but as a way of remembering and repairing our connection with our Nation’s soul.

An example of a renewal of more indigenous ways comes from the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma.²¹ Within the Choctaw Nation, one out of three people have diabetes and life expectancy is well below the national average. A local health services director reported that Western medical interventions were having very little effect on the health crisis among the Choctaw. He felt the cause of this impotence was “a sadness that I can’t put my finger on.” A consultant was called in. She helped develop an innovative program that promoted the building of cultural strength and healing from historical traumas, rather than putting the focus on an individual health problems and Western intervention.

Taking up the story of the Trail of Tears—the story of how the ancestors were forced to travel after being violently removed from their lands, the consultant designed a healing program that involved walking 50 kilometers and being on the Trail of Tears for ten days. During this time, there is no talking about medical problems. Instead participants are encouraged to say prayers when they wake up and to ask what the ancestors could teach them that day. They explore traditional teachings and medicine. They remember how their ancestors suffered and died, and how they can best honor with their lives that suffering and loss.

Morning/mourning in America

In the Spring of 2014, my husband and I arrived in New York City a few days before the beginning of a retreat facilitated by Robert Sardello. During the retreat, there were plans to spend a day at the 9/11 site and memorial. We were walking in Central Park one morning, when a friendly, local man out walking his dog, stopped us for a chat. He asked why we had come to New York. After we told him, he said that thousands died every day in other countries, but because it was us we make a huge, “mythical” deal of it and we should just move on.

His response was not what I expected, but that word, “mythical,” struck a deep chord and I found myself telling this gentleman how my husband and I had both woken up at the same time the night before 9/11. I told him we had sat up in bed and shared our similar feelings about the imminence of a major earth event: a fierce storm, or more likely an earthquake. I told the gentleman that I had since learned that many people throughout the world had a similar premonition. For me the premonition was an Earth-telling. Earth was telling me that something of major import to her soul’s destiny, something “earth shaking” was beginning. It was this Earth-telling that gave the event its mythic feel for me.

When I watched the news the morning of 9/11 and saw the planes crash into the Twin Towers, I knew this Nation was at the heart of some critical shift within Earth. I didn’t know what this shift would involve. I still don’t other than a few intimations. However, I do know that whatever is coming to birth means the loss of a lot of what we have known and relied upon up to this point. I believe learning how to surrender and grieve, individually and

collectively, will be a first step in preparing each one of us and our Nation for living within a new Earth.

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Essays

Bridging the divide

by Girija Shettar

The complex lexicon of Integral Yoga is both an advantage and an obstacle for devotees when explaining this path to newcomers. Professor Debashish Banerji¹ spoke to writer, Girija Shettar, to answer the question: ‘Can we de-center our position, in order to enter into dialog with others—on their own terms?’

The great detail in which Sri Aurobindo writes about his Yoga and expounds its supporting philosophy, is both an allure and a help to many who eventually end up on the practical path of Integral Yoga. However, there can be a tendency towards over-dependence on the terminology of the Yoga when trying to explain it to others, and in doing so, a departure from common ground with those outside the tradition.

“When people who are not exposed to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, or who have engaged with them only partially, interact with followers of this path, they hit a point of incomprehension. The followers start using Integral Yoga terminology, such as ‘overmind’, ‘supermind’, and ‘psychic being’, which results in the conversation quickly devolving into nonsense,” says Debashish.

Some spiritual paths have built effective bridges between themselves and others. Buddhism is an exemplary example of this. While followers of the Buddha belong to different sects, follow different disciplines, and have complex philosophical and psychological treatises attached to them, a unified internal and external profile



is maintained: all are Buddhists, and they even have a flag known as the Universal Buddhist Flag, which represents and honors the diversity of Buddhist paths. The group also has strong practical links with non-Buddhist parts of society.

Drawing on the Buddha’s simplest description of meditation, known as *Anapanasati* (breath awareness), Buddhists can teach this method to non-Buddhists as an entirely secular meditation, free from any specific religious or cultural imagery or activity, and free from any complex or confusing terminology. Thus stripped, the practice has been taken up widely, and has been simplified into a modified form known as Mindfulness, which is taught by non-Buddhists to non-Buddhists.

Two benefits that result from this clarity on the practical aspect of a spiritual path, are: the ability of many people to practice it and to teach it to others at different levels; and the natural way in which elements of Buddhist philosophy can be introduced to those who take up this secular form of practice, should they grow interested in knowing more or going deeper into it.

Now, the aim of this article is not to reduce, or ‘dumb-down’ Integral Yoga and its philosophy, and neither is it to create a way to subtly propagate this path. Rather, it is to break the

obstacle of intellectualism that can hinder clear communication to those who are new to it. The aim of this article, then, is to get back to the basics of Integral Yoga practice.

The first step that needs to be taken, however, is conceptual: understanding the aim of Integral Yoga. As Debashish says, practice “can only be deployed to good effect when the student has a clear understanding of the goal of Integral Yoga.” The word ‘Integral’ gives a clue as to the aim of this Yoga, as do other names it has been given, such as: Evolutionary Yoga, and Purna (‘full’) Yoga. This Yoga aims at continuing the evolutionary process of Nature. Thus, just as for example the principle of Mind evolved, integrated itself with, and changed Nature at the emotional and physical levels as well as giving it a new faculty, so Integral Yoga seeks the evolution of the highest Divine principle within Nature—which will also integrate itself with and change Nature. (*The Life Divine*). The result is an integralized consciousness: one that is entirely focused around—and eventually the same nature as—the Divine principle. By contrast, currently our Nature and consciousness are divided and discontinuous with each other.

Coming now to the practice of Integral Yoga. The first step we can take is to recognize that the primary movement of all yogas is also a primary requirement for Integral Yoga. To paraphrase the second verse of the ancient textbook on yoga, *The Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, that requirement is to still the fluctuations of consciousness—of consciousness, not just the mind—so fluctuations at all levels of consciousness—the mental, emotional, and physical levels—are included.

The practical power of this initial step cannot be underestimated. The *Yoga Sutras* describe the result as that



of abiding in one's true nature of pure awareness. Debashish refers to a paragraph in Sri Aurobindo's text on yoga, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, which explains in similar terms the effect of stilling these fluctuations: "...an inmost being hidden within...is able to come forward and illumine the rest and take up the lead of the sadhana [spiritual practice]" (p.145).

The aspect of inner guidance mentioned here is at the heart of Integral Yoga—for there are no physical teachers on this path, and no single method. This is because Integral Yoga believes in "the uniqueness of each individual," which naturally results "in a unique path or combination of methods for each person," says Debashish. In turn, this also explains why gaining access to inner guidance "and the purification and strengthening of that inner guidance" is so important, Debashish adds.

Integral Yoga thus differs from paths such as Buddhism and Mindfulness, which have teachers—either Buddhist monks and nuns, or non-Buddhists who have learned how to teach a form of breath awareness. But Debashish points out that Integral Yoga also differs from traditions wherein there are no physical teachers, such as the path of Sri Ramana Maharshi or Jiddu Krishnamurti. The difference is that on these paths, he says, "there is a simple and single goal, enlightenment, and a single method to follow, self-inquiry."

Most paths of yoga seek Enlightenment, also known as Liberation or Nirvana. That is, realizing the true Self of pure consciousness, awareness, and bliss. This provides the individual with a wonderful freedom from the pain and suffering of life, which stems from being the powerless victim of the fluctuations of our consciousness at the levels of mind, emotion, and physical body.

By contrast, Integral Yoga's evo-

lutionary goal briefly outlined above is broad-ranging, therefore, while it starts with the uncovering of the true Self and the gaining of enlightenment or liberation, it does not end there. Integral Yoga seeks a divine transformation of all parts of the being: all levels of consciousness (including sub-layers within each of those levels) are to be mutated by and changed into the Divine or divinized form of themselves. Thus this path, says Debashish, is "complex and can include many different methods".

"There is no one method. One can use any method from any discipline depending on the need for progress on the path of Integral Yoga. The important thing is to know what one needs to focus on at any given time. Thus, in effect, the method distills to one of inner guidance," says Debashish.

Coming to the next two key steps in Integral Yoga: (i) Becoming an instrument of the Divine's Power, and (ii) Becoming transformed by it. Debashish says: "These are not goals of other schools, and in Integral Yoga they need to be understood as goals, otherwise the yoga will not proceed to its destination."

The instrument used to effect these important steps of Integral Yoga is the inner being, the inner guide, called in Integral Yoga the 'psychic being'. It is the inner being which was revealed when the fluctuations of mental, emotional, and physical consciousness were stilled.

But this inner being, while it is a divine spark, must be developed in order to become the transformative force that is required for the evolutionary change envisaged by Integral Yoga. Two key methods used on this path for developing this inner being, are: (i) Aspiration for the Divine: The aspiration 'from below', as it were, is then answered by a descent from the non-personal Divine outside and above the

individual; and (ii) Surrender to the descending Divine. Thus the process of Nature accessing the Divine principle and allowing That to transform it takes place, which all equates to the evolutionary process at this level.

One specific conceptual, or philosophical point to note at this point, is that "Sri Aurobindo views our existence in the world as meaningful, and not merely a prison from which we need to escape," says Debashish. The difference here from certain paths to enlightenment, such as Buddhism, is thus clear. (For further discussion, see: *The Life Divine*, Part II, Ch XVI.) This is also, of course, in line with the Integral Yoga's aim to continue the evolution of Nature to a supreme and highest level.

Through surrender, we become an instrument of the Divine's Power, or in more psychological language: we submit to the will of the Divine in all the parts of our being, such as our mental operations, our emotional reactions, even our physical workings. This is a process of intricately feeling our way and gradually effecting more and more surrender and more and more of the divine influence to work upon us at every level and in every part.

Debashish compares this process to that of the Bhagavad Gita's Karma Yoga and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras'* Kriya Pada (known as *Ishwara Pranidhana*—surrender to the personal God). He says that the method has three steps, which are "partly simultaneous and partly successive." These are: (i) offering one's actions to the Divine Consciousness with the faith that it is the one true worker in the world, disguised by individualized appearances; (ii) offering the fruits of one's actions to the Divine; and (iii) losing one's personal sense of doer-ship, through its replacement by the perception of the Divine Consciousness as working through oneself and in all things."



“Through a process of surrender to this Consciousness, one allows it to take hold of one’s conscious existence in the form of direct intuitive guidance and action through one’s thoughts, emotions and physical activities,” he says.

The third step: being transformed by the Divine Consciousness, as Debashish says, is an extension of the second step above. Some may see in it the goal of Tantra, which aims to awaken the embodied spiritual force, known as Kundalini, and encourage it to rise through each of the seven chakras or energy centers in the body, opening them to their inherent, latent powers, including their highest spiritual nature. However, there are two differences from this in Integral Yoga. First is that the transformation of the being takes place, says Debashish, “by opening to the Divine Consciousness above the head and allowing it to descend into the chakras.” Thus, it is the Transcendent Divine’s choice as to how it works on transforming our being—there is no necessary order in which the chakras are opened, for example, and it is not our personal will directing the Force.

Intention and understanding of the goal of Integral Yoga is important to assist with this process—indeed, for the Yoga to make sense. Debashish says: “The surrender offered in action must extend itself to an aspiration for perfection in all the forces and instruments of the being... An aspiration in the mind to grow more intuitive and unerringly receptive to the ideas, visions and guidance of the Divine Consciousness; an aspiration in the heart to make one’s surrender to the Divine constant and conscious in all contacts and activities; an aspiration in the will to become an exclusive instrument of the Divine Will; and an aspiration in the body to be receptive and faithful to the demands of the Divine Consciousness, are the major practices.”

Coming back to the action in the chakras. Kundalini Yoga can be quite dramatic and even dangerous if not guided properly or if the proper protections are not in place. In Integral Yoga, these aspects are taken care of by surrender to the Transcendent Divine above the head, handing to It the work of transformation. However, the action on the chakras does gradually become more evident, says Debashish, when “one becomes more concretely conscious of the Divine Consciousness as a transformative presence and force pouring into one from above the head.”

“This transformative action intensifies and is perceived as if increasingly centered in the chakras, and through them, on the varied parts of the active being, stretching their limits and turning them plastic to the Divine Consciousness,” he says.

The result of these two steps are the experience that the Divine Consciousness occupies the whole being and carries out all its actions; and that one is a “form of the action of the Divine Consciousness in the world, and a form for the experience of the Bliss of Its Presence in action.”

In summary, then, Integral Yoga has three recognisable steps: (i) silencing the being in order to realise the true inner self behind nature’s fluctuations; (ii) becoming an instrument of the Divine Power; and (iii) being transformed by the Divine Power. At the outset and throughout, however, it is important to understand the aim of Integral Yoga, which is to contact the Divine principle and to enable it to evolve in one’s Nature, transforming and divinizing Nature, just as, before it, other principles, such as Mind, have changed Nature by their own unique principle.

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Sweetness

by Lopa Mukherjee

*Amritasya deva dharano bhuyasam.
Shariram me vicharshanam.
Jihva me madhumattama.
Karnabhyam bhuri vishruvam.
—Taittiriya Upanishad, Shikshavalli*

*O Lord, may I become a vessel of immortality.
May my body be swift to all works.
May my tongue drop pure honey.
May I hear vast and manifold lore
with my ears.
—Sri Aurobindo’s translation*

These words of our ancient sages have a power behind them. Uttering them will bring something of their potency into our lives: strength in our body, sweetness to our tongue, attentive ears, so that we can be prepared to hold the divine nectar. Such is the power of a mantra, compact yet clear in meaning. Entire disciplines of self-realization have spun from each of these pithy phrases.

Hatha yoga, dances and the culture of physical fitness spin off from shariram me vicharshanam, an energetic body. This I believe has been given its due in human civilization; one may even say a lopsided due. The art of war has become the science of combat. One has to just look at the armies of nations and the many wars they are fighting. Football and soccer games are no different than gladiator tournaments. Individual sports are all stress and little fun. There is big money and gambling involved. Media persons follow sports-stars like a pack of wolves. And now the million chatting tongues on social media. All these, and the many cuisines and comforts, at the service of the physical sheath. Enough



has been done here. Now a little energy needs to be diverted elsewhere.

Let's see where we are in *jihva me madhumatta*, "May my tongue drop pure honey". Bauls and Sufis have sung their songs, poets and storytellers have touched us. But at the same time there is loud crashing of drums and screaming voices, aptly called rock and rap, stories that keep you awake at night, poems that give you ideas for violence. *Vak shuddhi* is the discipline of the purification of speech. A saying from Manusmriti (4.138) advises wisely:

Speak truthfully, speak sweetly,

Speak not harsh truths, speak not sweet lies.

This is the eternal wisdom.

In other religions, it has been called the Golden Rule—do unto others as you would others do unto you. Mother says, "When you have nothing nice to say about someone, don't say anything." But people treat each other badly all the time. They get angry, they get hurt and want to hurt others. Or worse, they are sadists and enjoy hurting others, enjoy spreading fear. Some want to blame testosterone, or environment, or circumstance. But these people who have a rough tongue, perform consistently wherever they are, in all sorts of circumstances. And they are not just men, women too have the

same problem. Behind all these movements is the ego: feeling insecure if nobody listens to it, losing control unless it is acknowledged. With time these individuals lose connection with their emotional centers. They cannot empathize anymore. They become narcissists. They want the world to rotate around them, and snarl and growl when they don't get it. These people become unpleasant company. Who would want to talk to a know-it-all, eager to give advice with no patience to understand the person they are advising?

I want to share something I discovered when I first landed in America. People across the counter were polite, whether it was a bank teller, or a post office clerk, or grocery seller. They made eye contact, they asked how I was doing, they said 'thank you', or 'you are welcome' when I said 'thank you'. This was a new experience coming from India, where the person behind the counter often ignored you as a person, and sometimes even made you feel they were doing you a favor. Customer Service is an art the Western world has been working on. Even in daily speech they are not the blunt advice-giving type. These are some of the ways a rude phrase such as "You should do this" can be made polite. Of course, if the person who is giving advice thinks he is superior the phrases will come out fake. It is not about who is superior and who inferior. The whole paradigm is different. It is not about you, but about your helping someone. So here are some alternatives I have learnt:

"If I were you, I would do this."

"People have profited by doing this."

"If I may suggest, this may help."

"Do you think you want to do this?"

These behavioral traits are taught

at the home-school. But if adults themselves are rude, children have little chance.

Another disturbing trend has surfaced in all societies regarding rude speech. It is the anonymity of social media. People pass irresponsible and hurtful comments; and don't feel ashamed, because it is their faceless persona that does it. Internet trolling has become common. Recipients get nervous breakdowns or plunge into depression by abusive comments. Some have disconnected from social media. Some have become aggressive themselves. Psychologists say it is cowards who post rude comments anonymously. They are also apathetic. They don't want to walk in the shoes of the people they are hurting, or even learn what kind of journey brought them there. Some are attention seekers, like the chronic selfie-takers.

This brings us to the third phrase—*karnabhyam bhuri vishruvam*, listening attentively. The external ear has to start by listening to nature and people, before the inner ear can awaken to eternal Truths. The faculty of hearing is quickly losing its value in society. Before artificial sounds were born, we listened to birds, to raindrops, to evaporating dew and knew it was time to plant or harvest. We heard a sigh and felt someone's pain. Now they have to scream for us to notice. They have to pay a counselor to have someone listen to their problems. We have to go to classes to re-learn compassionate listening. Somewhere we took the wrong turn and landed in a graveyard.

The Mother told of a vision she saw during an occult journey of hers. This is a creation story. At first was the Supreme all alone, *Asat va idam agra aseat*. Then He wanted to create. So He created four formidable beings. The Lord of Life, Lord of Knowledge or Consciousness, Lord of Bliss or Love,



and Lord of Truth. The Supreme then created the first principle. It was freedom. The four beings were given full freedom. They began the experiment of creation. They created their opposites. Life created Death, Knowledge created Ignorance and Unconsciousness, Bliss and Love created Sorrow and Hate, Truth created Falsehood. All the eight powers reigned together and created quite a mess. The Supreme then decided to plunge a portion of Himself into the creation to save it. This first emanation was Love. It came as a Mother, Father, Friend, Lover, Guide of all beings. Love did not come alone. She came with her entourage of gods and goddesses. She is actively waging occult battles all the time. We remember her once a year as Durga, another time as Saraswati, as Kali, as Lakshmi, as Virgin Mary, as Kwan Yin, as Tara. But she is always there in the earth's atmosphere ready to seat herself in any heart that is open to her. These become her weapons. That is why she has a thousand arms, each wielding a weapon of its own.

Sadly, the reverse is also true. Those who bare themselves to the evil powers become their seat of action. Those with impurities of egoism, sadism, cruelty, roughness of tongue, those who think they know a lot, who lack humility... become prey to evil powers. The Adversaries too are watching to capture human instruments, they too have weapons, they too are always in the earth's atmosphere. In Mother's prayer, "Glory to Thee, O Lord" are the following lines:

Grant that nothing in us shall be
an obstacle in Thy work.
Grant that nothing may retard
Thy manifestation...
Grant that we may be faithful to
Thee utterly and for ever.
We would be completely under

Thy influence to the exclusion of every other.

Research is continuously being done to prove the benefits of being on the right side. If you have compassion within you, it makes your immune system stronger, removes depression, and sharpens your intelligence. These measures are what our current civilization values. Empathy lessons are being taught in schools now. They are termed variously as emotional intelligence, self-awareness, mindfulness. Adults are taught non-violent communication, the art of compassionate listening, meditation. There is great skill in being non-judgmental. It means silencing the ego, having no preferences, such as 'I like/dislike this', 'it is good/bad', 'it is worse/better than'. It's hard enough dealing with conscious biases, how do we control our unconscious biases? Well, there are experts offering classes, as you may have guessed. There are anger management courses. Truth Commissions have been set up in countries with a history of conflict, like South Africa and Sri Lanka. Here crimes are forgiven as long as the perpetrators come forward and decide to give up their past. Prisons have meditation and hatha yoga programs, which means people realize crime can be prevented by promoting a connection to the spirit.

It has been asked, "How early can one teach empathy to kids?" A social scientist reports this: when she was on a plane she heard a baby cry loudly. All passengers sat still, pretending not to be bothered. Only a three-year-old responded. He climbed out of his seat and offered his pacifier to the baby. These kids were strangers. Amongst siblings love is quite natural. It is when they see a disproportionate love coming from adults do they start getting ideas. So the answer is: kids can be

trained as early as possible. Training kids is not enough, adults around them need to be trained too. This leads us to the uncomfortable topic of ACEs.

ACE stands for "Adverse Childhood Experience", which is a term used for all the bad things that happen to children. It too has been studied in detail by social and medical professionals in the USA, and perhaps in other places too. They have found that people who suffered a poor childhood are affected by it their entire life. They have a weaker immune system and thus are prone to diseases. They live about 20 years less than others. They have psychological problems; they cannot perform well in studies or jobs. When they have children, they pass on their sad upbringing to their children. And the cycle continues down the generations.

There are ten categories of ACEs. Abuse is the first category, which is way too common. Physical abuse—where children are beaten, not fed well, not cleaned on time. Psychological abuse is when they are scolded, belittled, called names, compared to others, given no importance. And then there is sexual abuse. Aamir Khan's television program called *Satyameva Jayate* had an episode on this subject. It is so heart rending, I am unable to write anymore about it. You can watch the program; it is available on the internet. The other ACEs are categorized as household dysfunctions. They are: parents quarrelling, going through divorce, neglect of children, alcoholism or drug abuse in the family, mother being beaten, parent going to prison, scarcity of food and other resources, bullying by adults, death of a parent.

When a pediatrician in a depressed community in the USA first found these common threads in her patients, she stopped giving them attention deficiency medication and de-



cided to follow on her hunch. She befriended these abused kids, and gave them her ears. They had never been given the gift of listening. Their stories made her cry. She assured them it wasn't they who were dumb or slow. It was their life situation. That very revelation gave them relief. So it wasn't them? They were not born stupid? And with that knowledge they gained confidence to fight their situation. She started teaching them mindfulness meditation to develop resilience.

But how can you solve a multifaceted problem by just pacifying the victims? It has to be brought to the attention of teachers and parents. So the doctor became a social activist, teaching about ACEs and calling all to compassionate action. The parents who misbehaved were themselves often products of ACEs. But armed with knowledge they could turn around and give a saner childhood to their children. The ACE study then asked American adults all over the country about ACEs in their own childhood. It turned out that two-thirds of them said they had at least four ACEs. I can imagine people of other countries having similar responses. Such a large population of humans suffered in their childhood and did not complain! A child does not know whom to trust outside the family. So whom should he complain to? Often the family threatens more harm if they complain. Children are taught that family matters should not be spilled outside. Thus many misdemeanours witnessed by children surface in other ways, later in life.

From using crude language and abusive behavior—specially towards children and subordinates—to becoming a sociopath on a killing spree,

a gangster, or terrorist... all these can be roughly traced to childhood ACEs. Children are like wet clay tablets. Anything marked on them can become deep stabs, and can remain forever. They are sensitive to injustice and understand it very well. Maybe adults do not know it, but children are watching them. Adults are the first role models. And if they find adults misbehaving, children will strike them out of their good books. But if they see their role models before they know what is good behavior, they will end up copying these bad behaviors. How often have we seen a nasty child in a nasty family! Mother often lamented the stupidity of parents. When children were brought to the Ashram school she told parents

The Dalai Lama says, "Compassion is not a luxury anymore, but a necessity." Sages of all ages have warned that hate begets more hate. None of the problems of hate can be solved with more hate. Only love can solve them.

that they were offering the child to her. They would become the keepers and Mother the true mother. Sometimes parents wanted to take their children away from the Ashram because they felt the children did not love them enough. Mother fought hard to explain to the parents, whom privately, in her *Agenda*, she called selfish, ignorant, arrogant, expecting love without giving love.

At last, authorities have realized this surprising truth. To stop crime, you must treat children well. Future criminals are growing up in dysfunctional families. A certain event demonstrates this well. In Brazil, a few decades back, abortion was legalized on the advice of social scientists. They found crimes were committed by those who grew up as orphans or street kids. And where did they come from? From unwanted pregnancies. They were abandoned by

their parents and were never shown love. They grew up without knowing human kindness and when they killed someone they felt no pang. They could not empathize with the victims' or their families' pains. Within a generation of the abortion policy, crime rates fell dramatically.

Removing ACEs is not always in a person's control. What if they are victims of a mad dictator? What if they are of a slave nation, tortured by their masters? We are not talking of political colonization, but economic slavery, which has replaced it snugly. Therefore, training parents and teachers is just the beginning. Activists ask everyone to be conscious of a suffering child. If you notice a child with bruises or wander-

ing eyes, please report to the right authorities. These wounded kids may need a specially trained counselor to

draw out their secrets. Training business people and statesmen is another challenge. Businesses have made a lot of progress in this area. Corporations sponsor hospitals, schools, and other charitable projects. People spend time in *seva*, or donate goods and money. This is offering without expectation for return, the essence of Karma Yoga.

Can people be trained in empathy later in life? "Sure," says the Dalai Lama. Now is the best time. Every day there are conferences around the world on increasing compassion. Speakers range from Zen masters and scientists to non-believers and ex-criminals. The Dalai Lama says, "Compassion is not a luxury anymore, but a necessity." Sages of all ages have warned that hate begets more hate. None of the problems of hate can be solved with more hate. Only love can solve them. Think of the Partition. Once the first stone



was cast, the revenge went back and forth until half a million were massacred. Within this madness there were voices that besieged for love. Films and stories are written every day making a pitch for love. In Palestine, a professor started teaching his students about the holocaust atrocities Jews had to face. A former Israeli soldier is condemning Israeli violence. Both of them have had to seek refuge in the West. But such people do exist. Parents from both sides who have lost children to this 70 year war have formed an organization. They work together as a team bound by the sacred ties of love and empathy. Within their hearts the seed of Divine Love is growing. The good battle is going on.

When the Amitabha Buddha was crossing over to the eternal peace of Nirvana, he turned on the threshold one last time. He saw sentient beings suffering on earth. One tear drop trickled down his cheek, and that tear drop became the bodhisattwa of compassion. *Avalokiteshwar* he is called, the “downward gazing one.” He took on a female form and became Kwan Yin. She has a thousand arms and a weapon in each. Sometimes she is the mother soothing our wounds, sometimes she is fighting in the frontline.

A native American story of the Cherokee people goes like this. Once a little boy comes to his grandfather in anger. He has been wronged by a friend and wants to take revenge. His grandfather says, “Sit awhile, let me tell you a story. I too have felt hate for people who take so much and feel no sorrow. But hate wears you down and does not solve problems. It is like taking poison and wishing your enemy would die. Two wolves are fighting inside every person. One is kind and does no harm. He tries to live in harmony and pardons the offences that were done unto him. He will only fight

when it is right to do so for a greater good. The other wolf is full of hate. He flies into a rage and hurts others without reason. He cannot think because his mind and heart are clouded by anger and hate. Sometimes these two wolves start fighting.” The boy looked at his grandfather intently, and asked, “Which one wins?” The grandfather smiled and replied, “The one you feed.”

Let us end on a sweet note, *madhurena samapayet*. In Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem *Savitri*, when Savitri has conquered Death and has been granted a boon by the Supreme, she asks for peace, oneness, energy for humanity. Again, and again the Supreme asks her to choose something for herself, like *moksha* or the bliss of Union, but she repeatedly chooses boons for humanity, and resolves to return to the earth.

In me the spirit of immortal love
Stretches its arms out to embrace
mankind.
Too far thy heavens for me from
suffering men.
Imperfect is the joy not shared
by all.
O to spread forth, O to encircle
and seize
More hearts till love in us has
filled thy world!

At the end, the Supreme is satisfied with her and grants all her boons. He sends her back amongst sentient beings to be the “Mother of unnumbered souls”. The very last boon she had asked was this:

Thy embrace which rends the living
knot of pain,
Thy joy, O Lord, in which all creatures
breathe,
Thy magic flowing waters of deep
love,
Thy sweetness give to me for earth
and men.

Education in the age of the Upanisads

by Gopal Bhattacharyya

“India is still in request in the world for the treasures of her thought. These treasures are embodied in Sanskrit literature...which is remarkable in the literature of the world for its vastness, volume, variety, quality and longevity, and justifies the education of which it is the product.”¹

The richness and variety of Indian culture perhaps justifies an inquiry into the systems of education which produced such a culture. Observing the vastness of the literature again and in some disciplines its relevance to modern thought, one naturally wonders what sort of upbringing was responsible for such a host of creative talents. A research scholar, it is presumed, would be interested in discovering the sort of education that preserved and transmitted this variegated culture and civilization generation after generation for more than 4000 years, particularly at a time when printing and modern means of communication were not known.²

A student of Sanskrit literature comes across a system of education not only during the period of the Rig Veda, which is regarded as the earliest record of human thought (1500 BCE),³ and not to speak of still earlier periods, but also during the later Vedic period (800-700 BCE). The aim of this paper, however, is to investigate the literature of the Upanisads,* which is regarded as the “product of the highest wisdom”⁴ to find out the educational system during that period.

* Upanisad literally means: *upa*=near, *ni*=down, *sad*=to sit.



The Upanisads are the closing chapter or the end (*anta*) of the Vedas, Badaryana attempted to systematize the teachings of the Upanisads into Sutras which are known as Brahma Sutras or Vedanta Sutras and also known as Sariraka Sutras.⁵ The era of the Vedanta is regarded as the most creative period of Indian thought. It is a period when there was a remarkable achievement not only in the quest of reality, but also it was the age when other branches of knowledge were also cultivated.⁶

Upanisads come under Arthvada of the Vedas which include explanations of the practical instructions (*Vidhi*) for sacrifice which later took the form of philosophical speculation on the nature of Reality. The education coming under the period of the Upanisads was based on the Vedic Schools which were the ancient seats of learning and, in fact, were “colonies in which were centered the talent, the piety, the culture of the community, from which they radiated in all directions.”⁷

How many Upanisads there once were is difficult to ascertain. Of these at present 108 can be traced. Though they differ in “style and manner,” their teachings are consistent. Of these 108, Shankara had recognized 16 as authentic, but wrote commentaries on 10 only, and these are: Isha, Kena, Katha,

Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Chandogya, Brhadaranyaka, Aiteraya, and Taittiriya.⁸ For our study, we will limit ourselves to these ten Upanisads and the Svetavatara and Maitri Upanisads.

The aim of human life according to the teachings of the Vedas including the Upanisads is fourfold: *Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (enjoyment), and *Moksa* (spiritual liberation).⁹ This again is related to four successive stages of life, called *Asramas*: *Brahmacarya* (period of student life), *garhasthya* (period of life of a householder), *Vanaprasthya* (period of retirement) and *Sannyasa* (period of Renunciation).¹⁰ The concept and the aims of education of the age of the Upanisads were directly related to the aims of life and were concerned with the twofold path *Preyas* and *Sreyas*, “world-life with the everlasting beyond.”¹¹

Admission to studentship was inaugurated by *Upanayana* which means the celebration of bringing the student near the teacher.¹² The teacher would take charge of the student by holding his right hand and touch his heart and pray to the Sun that the student’s intellect be stimulated and there is “harmonious co-operation in keen and vigorous studies.”¹³ In the text of the Taittiriya Upanisad (Chapter 11) and in the invocation of the Katha Upanisad we find the prayer of the teacher as follows:

Saha navavatuy, saha nau bhunaktu, sha viryam karavavahai tejasvinav adhitam stu: ma vidvisavahai; Aum Santih, Santih, Santih.

“May He protect us both: may He be pleased with us both; may we work together with vigor; may our study make us illumined; may there be no dislike between us. Aum Peace, Peace, Peace.”¹⁴

In some places we find the teacher praying for more students: “As waters

run downward, as months into the year, so into me, may students of sacred knowledge come.”¹⁵ This desire for more students was not for any worldly benefit, but for propagation of the truths they had discovered.

In the process of gaining knowledge the need of the teacher was held indispensable. In the Katha Upanisad we find: “Arise, awake, and approaching the best of Teachers (Shankara’s interpretations) know (the world of Reality).”¹⁶ In the Chandogya Upanisad, a teacher is regarded as a person who removes the bondage of a blindfolded man who wants to find his way home.¹⁷

In such a scheme of education it is just natural that the teacher was expected to possess all that is best in human beings. Katha Upanisad says:

*Na narenavarena prokta esa suvi-
jueyo bahudha cintyamanah* (1.2.8)

Taught by an inferior man He cannot be truly understood as He is thought of in many ways.”¹⁸

The Mundaka Upanisad says:

*“Tad vijnanartham sa gurum
evabhogiccehet samit-panih Srtriyam
brama-nistham.”* (1.2.12)

“For the sake of this knowledge, let him (a student) only approach (for admission), with a sacrificial fuel in hand, a teacher who is learned in the scriptures and established in Brahman.”¹⁹

In the Prasna Upanisad the teacher says:

*Naham imam veda, ydyaham
imam avedisam katham te navaksyam
iti, samulo va esa parisusyati yo’nrtam
abhivadati, tasman narhamy anrtam
vktum...* (VI.1)

“I know him (the person with sixteen parts) not. If I had known him, why should I not tell you about it. Verily to his roots, he withers, who speaks untruth. Therefore, it is not proper for me to speak untruth.”²⁰

It is the duty of the teacher to teach



his student exactly as he would know. The Mundaka Upanisad advises: “unto him who has approached in due form, whose mind is tranquil and who has attained peace, let the knowledgeable (teacher) teach in its very truth that knowledge about Brahman by which one knows the imperishable person, the true.”²¹

Sometimes, as was the case with Svetaketu Aruneya in Chandogya Upanisad (Chapter VI, Section 1), the father would be the teacher. Sage Uddalaka, Svetaketu’s father became his teacher, although he (Svetaketu) was sent to a teacher for his education and he spent 12 years, having studied all the Vedas and other subjects with the teacher, would not know of the ultimate Reality.²²

The period of studentship normally would not exceed 12 years and it would begin at the age of 12. There were certain special duties of the student, like, begging, pulling fuel for the fires, and tending the teacher’s cattle. Each of these had its spiritual purposes. Begging, for example, would produce in the student a spirit of humbleness, tending the fire would enkindle the mind of the student and tending cattle or guarding the teacher’s house would make the student feel living the life as a member of the teacher’s family (*Gurukul*).^{23**}

The teacher-taught relationship was very cordial. The student would look upon his teacher as his spiritual father. Each day of study would begin with a prayer which would mean teacher and pupil are united by a common aim of propagating the knowledge and showing its worth in the life we live. In Prasna Upanisad we have

the students addressing the teacher:

Tvam hi nah pita yo’smakam avidyayah param param tarayasi, iti (VI. 8).

“Thou indeed art our father who does take us across to the other shore of ignorance.”²⁴

The teacher would expect that his pupils would speak the truth, practice virtue, study regularly, should not neglect the duties to the mother, the father, the teacher, the quest, practice charity with faith and modesty (while back at home after the period of studies). If there is any doubt regarding conduct in a particular situation, the teacher would expect his pupils to behave as the other *brah-*

Their curriculum during the age of the Upanisads covered a wide range. The student would start with phonetics, metrics and elementary grammar and etymology for studying the Vedas properly. (For a list of the various subjects studied during this period, see *Ancient Indian Education* by Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji, pp. 105–112.) In the Mundaka Upanisad (I.1. 4–5). Knowledge (and, therefore, the subject of study) and the lower (*apara vidya*). Of these two kinds, the lower is the Rig Veda, the Sam Veda, the Yajur Veda, and the Atharva Veda, Phonetics, Ritual, Grammar, Etymology, Metrics and Astrology. And the higher is that by which the imperishable is

apprehended.”²⁸ In the Isha Upanisad we find the justification of attaining both lower and higher knowledge:

The teacher-taught relationship was very cordial. The student would look upon his teacher as his spiritual father. Each day of study would begin with a prayer which would mean teacher and pupil are united by a common aim of propagating the knowledge and showing its worth in the life we live.

mana (scholars) competent to judge. As a matter of fact, the teacher would remind his student of all these at the farewell address to the students (Taittiriya Upanisad I, II. 1–6).²⁵ The Katha Upanisad stresses control over mind and over purity of heart: “*Samanaska Sada Suchin*,” and to have understanding “*vignananavan*” for a student aspiring true knowledge (I.3.8). Study and teaching would be given special importance along with the pursuit of the right, the true, austerity, self-control, tranquility, consecration of Fires, Sacrifice, social duties and continuity of the race (Taittiriya Upanisad I.8.1).²⁶ The Upanisads would require that the student should be calm (*santa*), self-restrained (*danta*), self-denying (*uprata*), patient (*titiksu*) and collected (*samahita*) for attaining highest knowledge.²⁷

*Sambhutim ca vinasam ca
Yas tad vedobhayam saha
Vinasena mrtyum tirtva
Sambhutya amrtam asnute*
(Verse 14)

“He who understands the manifest and the unmanifest both together, crosses death through the unmanifest and attains life eternal through the manifest.”²⁹ Thus an ideal scheme of education according to this Upanishad should prepare human beings “to lead a life in the manifested world

**A student should be called *Brahmacharin* or *Antevasin* which would mean young learner or scholar leading a celibate life and living in the family of the teacher. The same might be applied to a young female student who would then be called *Brahmacharini* or *Antevasini*.



with a spirit of non-attachment, with the mind centered in the unmanifest remembering that the eternal is the soul of the temporal.”³⁰

In the Chandogya Upanisad we have the story of Sanat Kumar instructing Narada as his student (VII. 1 paras. 1–5). When Narada was asked to tell what subjects he had already studied, he gave a list which indicates what sort of subjects were taught during that period. The list includes the Rig Veda, the Sam Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Atharva Veda as the fourth, the Legend and Ancient Lore, the Veda of the Vedas (i.e. grammar), Propitiation of the Fathers, the Science of numbers (mathematics), the Science of portents (Augury), the science of time (Chronology), Logic, Ethics and Politics. The Science of the gods, the Science of Sacred Knowledge, the Science of elemental spirits, the Science of weapons, Astronomy, the Science of serpents and the Fine Arts. Narada added that he had learned all these, but they were words (*Mantravid*) only; because he was yet to learn what Atman (*Atmavid*) was.³¹

The teachings of the Upanisads by and large give stress on realisation of Atman and Brahman as ultimate Reality. This is indeed the highest knowledge according to the teacher of the Upanisads. The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad suggests three steps for realization of this highest knowledge.

1. *Sravana*, hearing with faith (*sraddha*); this includes: (a) *upakarma* (admission), (b) *abhhyasa* (constant practice of what is heard from the teacher), (c) *Phala* (comprehension of the effect), (d) *Arthavada* (Study of the meaning as they are in the explanatory texts) and (e) *Upapatti* (arriving at a conclusion).

2. *Manana* (Reflection)

3. *Nididhyasana* (Concentration Contemplation).³²

For the direct knowledge of the ultimate Truth Brahman, a pupil would withdraw the senses from the object of senses and concentrate on the inner self which, in reality is yoga or union with the one in harmony with diversities. In the Katha Upanisad (I.3.13) we have:

“The wise man should restrain speech in mind; the latter he should restrain in the understanding self. The understanding he should restrain in the great self. The great self he should restrain in the tranquil self.”³³

In the Svetasvatara Upanisad (II: paras. 8–13) the practice of yoga has been described. In paragraph 9 chapter II it is said:

“Repressing his breathing here (in the body) let him who has controlled all movements, breathe through his nostrils, with diminished breath; let the wise man restrain his mind vigilantly as (he would) a chariot yoked with the vicious horses.”³⁴ Also in the Maitri Upanisad (VI: paras. 18 and 19) there is a description of the method of yoga.³⁵

Thus we see the Upanisads are forerunners of the yoga Sutras of Patanjali, and using yoga as a method of realizing *Para Vidya* which would concern the Intrinsic Truth leading to Ultimate Reality, and that would be the aid of education of ancient India. The Upanisads often show the method of explaining a subject by a series of questions and answers as in later years we find the teaching of Socrates. The pupil in those days were encouraged to ask questions and the teacher would answer these questions with illustrations and stories. Often they were asked to experiment with their own experiences before they would reach a conclusion.³⁶ The use of discussion and debate as methods of study led to the development of Logic or *Tarka* or *Nyaya Sastra*.

The *Tapovan*as or the Sylvan Forest Schools where such higher thoughts were cultured were actually the homes of the teachers which might be principally regarded as the type of school during the period. The system was known as *Gurukul* which would actually mean living the life as a member of the family (*kul*) of the teacher (Guru).³⁷

The kings of the country would patronage the education of those days by inviting the learned scholars of their times for discussion of truths of life as known by the scholars. It was in such academic meetings or conferences that the truths of earlier years of the scholars were tested and matured through criticism and analysis.³⁸

References and Notes

Some of the books referenced in this paper are available to read online at the following URLs:

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6. *Ancient Indian Education*, op. cit., pp. 84–85 and *Indian Philosophy*, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 137–139.

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9. *Renasant Hinduism*, by D. S. Sarma, Chowpathy, Bombay, India: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The four aims of life are known as *Purusarthas*.

10. *The Hindu View of Life* by S. Radhakrishnan, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941, p. 82, and *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, op. cit., p. 37. Professor Paul Deussen's view is that the division of each of the Vedas into Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanisads is based on the principle of dividing life into four successive stages: student-life, life of a householder, life of retirement, and life of renunciation. These stages may be divided according to age as follows: Admission to student life came at the age of 12. The period of student life lasted up to the age of 24. The householder period lasted up to the age of 50. After the age of 50 came the periods of retirement and renunciation (*Panchasurdhve Vanam Vrajat*).

11. *Ancient Indian Education*, op. cit., p. 156.

12. *Education in Ancient India*, op. cit., p. 301.

13. *The Principal Upanisads* by S. Radhakrishnan, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1989, p. 594.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 594, 574. Isha Upanisad 11. The verse explains: to understand the consciousness of oneness and the consciousness of multiplicity which are termed as *Vidya* and

Avidya or *Sambhutim* or *Vinasam* as in Verse 14 of the same Upanisad, is the perfect aim or ideal of education and of life. These may be taken as ultimate and proximate aims leading to the Supreme.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 531.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 628.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 464 and *Education in Ancient India*, op. cit., p. 89, notes from the Chandogya Upanisad (V, 14, 1–2). "Precisely my dear sir, as a man who has been brought blindfolded from the country of Gandhara and then set at liberty at a place where there are no human beings, and just as that person would shout towards the east or north or south or west, 'I have been brought here blindfolded and blindfolded set at liberty.' And as, (after that) someone has taken off the bandage, and has told him, 'In this direction Gandhara lies, go in this direction.' Thereupon instructed and prudent, asking the road from village to village, he finds his way home to Gandhara; even so the man who in this world has met with a teacher, becomes conscious.

"To this (transitory world) shall I belong only until the time of my release, thereupon shall I reach perfection."

18. *The Principal Upanisads*, op. cit., p. 610.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 678–79.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 666.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 679.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

23. *Ancient Indian Education*, op. cit., pp. 93–94.

24. *The Principal Upanisads*, op. cit., p. 668.

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26. *Ibid.*, p. 536.

27. *Ancient Indian Education*, op. cit., pp. 95–96.

28. *The Principal Upanisads*, op. cit., p. 672.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 576.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 577.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 468–70.

32. *Ancient Indian Education*, op. cit., p. 114.

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34. *Ibid.*, p. 721, verses 8–13.

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Sri Aurobindo's Gnostic being and Nietzsche's superman: A comparative analysis

by Bharatwaj Iyer

I. A preliminary outline of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy

Our discussion of Sri Aurobindo's thought must begin, odd though it may seem, with the discussion of an idea that arose, for the first time at least in the western world, some 13 years before he was born, about which the philosopher Daniel Dennett in our times has this to say, 'If I were to give an award for the single best idea anyone has ever had, I'd give it to Darwin, ahead of Newton and Einstein and everyone else. In a single stroke, the idea of evolution by natural selection unifies the realm of life, meaning, and purpose with the realm of space and time, cause and effect, mechanism and physical law.'¹ As our quotation makes it clear, the idea we are talking about is evolution by natural selection, and the man who struck upon it was Charles Darwin. Darwin discovered a very simple, yet comprehensive, principle lying at the very basis of life: struggle. A struggle for survival and reproduction between



individual organisms occupying a limited resourced environment. Struggle and competition in nature was not unknown to people before Darwin made his discovery. In fact, Tennyson in his poem *In Memoriam AHH* written in 1849 (exactly 10 years before Darwin published his theory in the *Origin of Species*) calls nature, 'Nature, red in tooth and claw'. What was unique in Darwin's theory was the idea that this red and bloody competition in nature, random though it may appear, has a law governing it. What is this law? Random mutation and natural selection. Organisms compete against each other for and in their limited environments and ecology, and certain random changes, dispositions, strokes of luck, or capacities give them an edge, in survival and reproduction, over their competitors. These beneficial traits then get passed on to the next generation, and they accumulate over a course of time, thus creating species of organisms better and better adapted to survival, while causing the extinction of those not so adapted.

Progression towards greater organisation, superior adaptability, greater endurance, and reproductive capacity seem to be the goals towards which nature selects living beings. The

word selection in 'natural selection' is itself interesting. The fact that an anti-metaphysical and materialistic system such as evolutionary biology should hint at nature as a selecting agent, who picks the fittest and discards the unfit has a vague metaphysical tone to it, but that is an entirely different subject of discussion.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy too, in one sense, is a philosophy of nature. But not one that views nature from nature's point of view alone and thus enmeshed in it and cut off from that which may be beyond it. Nor is it totally absent from nature, and from the ivory tower of the spirit viewing nature as a mere charade, a dream-like non-existence, a total illusion. Both these approaches he rejects in *The Life Divine*,² and calls them the "Two Negations": the former of the materialist, the latter of the ascetic. His is instead an integral philosophy, one that integrates and brings together in knowledge and transcendent insight all the realms of external and internal experience: Matter, Life, Mind and Spirit. The insight that philosophy is to aim at ought to be genuinely cosmic, a consciousness that sees Matter and Spirit as equally real. In his words, 'Attaining to the cosmic consciousness Mind, illuminated by a knowledge that perceives at once the truth of Unity and the truth of Multiplicity and seizes on the formulae of their interaction, finds its own discords at once explained and reconciled by the divine Harmony.'³

From inert and dead matter does the principle of life evolve. It is matter that acts as the staging post before the complexity of life and its systems make their appearance in the world. For life to evolve from matter it must already be involved in matter—either in the sense of potentiality, or in the very nature of matter's make up. In the long course of natural history, conscious-

ness makes its appearance with the entrance of the human being on the stage—with his ability to transcend the narrow bounds of instinct, blind obedience to nature's relentless laws and to the amorality of her random struggles for survival. Consciousness is capable of towering above biology and view the whole, as though from a superior vantage point. Just as life was involved in matter before it evolved out of it, so was mind in life. In his *Mind and Cosmos*⁴ the philosopher Thomas Nagel suggests that the universe from the very beginning was such that it had in it the raw materials for the evolution of complex, self-conscious organisms. Its course was from the very start pointing towards where we are at present—as though with a teleological necessity. But Sri Aurobindo's evolution doesn't stop with where we are at present, with the mind as we know it to be now. If an infinitely superior and complex principle of organisation could have been involved in an infinitely inert matter, why must an infinite potential not be hidden in the mind, only to evolve into mental systems vastly superior, vastly more powerful, transcending all that mentality is now capable of. The overmind is the last stage in the evolution of the mind in a series of stages leading to the Supermind. But the overmind, integral, transcendental, in touch with the all-embracing Truth-Consciousness though it may be, is still in the realm of instrumentality and technicality. 'Overmind Energy (has the) ...capacity of separation and combination of the powers and aspects of the integral...all-comprehending Unity (of the Supermind). It takes each aspect or power and gives it an independent action in which it acquires a full separate importance.'⁵ As the statement makes it clear, the overmind is not the all-comprehending Unity, Brahman.



If Darwin's evolution heads on with no greater purpose than that of further survival and reproduction, Sri Aurobindo's is like a purposeful play of nature, playfully bringing about higher formations. The Ultimate Truth-Consciousness or the Supreme Brahman is not to be found in an empty isolation like the Purusha of the Shamkya system, but is integrated with Nature or Prakriti herself, and through her play she reveals it to the highest consciousness. Maya or Ignorance, and Knowledge or Jnana become different aspects in the same integral process. It is the same reality that causes both. Like in Sufi metaphysics, the world (or nature) becomes at the same time the obstruction and the pathway toward God, it becomes at once opaque and transparent. Nature is at the same time the instrument toward and away from God, for God in His absolute transcendence and aloneness need not be known, nor is there anything or anyone apart from Him to know Him. God uses matter as a way of knowing Himself, being the only being that there is. In a Sufi saying, which captures God's reason for creation, we read, 'I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known; so I created the world that I might be known.'⁶ This dual aspect of knowledge is also brought brilliantly forth by the Sri Aurobindo scholar Ram Nath Sharma in these terms, 'Knowledge and Ignorance are not two irreconcilable principles... they are two co-existent powers, both present in the universe itself, diversely operating in the conduct of its processes but one in their essence and able to pass by a mutual transmutation into each other.'⁷

Darwin's evolution, to return to a point we touched on, is without purpose, random and totally devoid of meaning, and in its terms nature itself is such that, 'The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should

expect if there is at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.'⁸ This is the diametric anti-thesis of the spiritual evolutionism of Sri Aurobindo—not in terms of its approach or methods of studying nature, but in the very value it assigns to nature. An evaluative judgment such as this is not within the domain of science at all, but is in fact an instance of science unconsciously, and ineptly, dabbling in matters metaphysical. Sri Aurobindo's Nature or Prakriti, in contrast, is full of design, full of purpose, full of moral significance, with mercy, joy or Ananda embedded in it. Its end is the Supermind, the Gnostic being, in touch with the Transcendent, nay, being the manifestation of that very Transcendence itself—to the discussion of which we shall now turn.

II. Sri Aurobindo's gnostic being

There is, first, the realm of the finite with which mind and mental being deals. The way it deals with it could be described with the term instrumentation, often used by Sri Aurobindo. With instrumentation goes the idea of organisation and capacity for manipulation. The stage of mental being is a very precarious one, for it contains within it the allure of what Heidegger calls technicity. The desire for mental and physical control of nature. But nature is by her nature infinite, and such a desire must by its very nature be frustrated. When this separative consciousness falls to its knees, by its very nature being untrue, the more integral and unified consciousness takes its place and the stage is set for the evolution of Mind into Overmind. The Overmind is also at the level of mind, though at a greater level of spiritualisation and integration, as we noted earlier. Beyond this is the inexplicable level

from which, to quote the Upanishads, 'come back baffled both words and mind'. His own definition of the Supermind is: 'supramental nature must be a perfect integration and consummation of spiritual nature and experience: it would also contain in itself, by the very character of the evolutionary principle... a total spiritualisation of mundane Nature.'⁹ At another place he says, 'supramental nature is in its very grain a consciousness and power of the infinite.'¹⁰ Also, 'Supramental Nature sees everything from the standpoint of oneness and regards all things... in the light of that oneness.'¹¹

This unifying consciousness is borne by the sages and saints who have 'become one' with the Absolute. 'The gnostic individual would be the summation of the spiritual man.' Let us look at some of the characteristics of this paradigm of spiritual beings and the summit of evolution.

- *Unified Awareness:* To the gnostic consciousness the whole of reality is a unity. Nature, insentient and conscious, inert and vital are seen from the standpoint of and as different aspects of the same Total Oneness—the sat-chit-ananda. As there is an upward push from within Nature toward Supernature, so too is there a pull from Supernature. To the gnostic being everything is but a reflection and manifestation of the same reality—a united diversity and a diverse unity present themselves to his integral consciousness awareness. 'In the gnostic consciousness difference would not lead to discord but to a spontaneous nature adaptation, a sense of complementary plenitude.'¹²

- *Universal Compassion:* As all of Nature's diversity is but a manifestation of the same Truth-Consciousness, the gnostic being is filled with love for all beings and all things. For all beings are united with him, the whole of var-



iegated nature being but him in the ultimate sense. When Truth dawns and the realisation of oneness takes over, the heart of the man of gnosis develops a feeling of joy at the joy of all beings, and deep pathos for the suffering that is the combined lot of all sentient beings. But this latter is not in the limited sense of the ego suffering or enjoying in the present mental state of being. His sympathy, instead, would be transcendental in character, and part of his inborn truth: '...his cosmic sympathy will be part of his inborn truth of being and not dependent on a personal participation in the lesser joy and suffering; it will transcend what it embraces.'¹³

- *Communitarian spirituality*: A community or race of supramental beings playing the role of the vanguard of humanity's present state of cultural development, and leading them on towards higher reaches of truth-awareness, is what is envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. Not a race of beings, the exact copies of each other, but one in which each one is diversified in his own specific aspect of the universality. Each with his own mode of self-expression and self-abundance, but united in the ultimate Truth of which they are reflectors and representatives. 'This collectivity would be and act not as a mechanical but a spiritual integer',¹⁴ says Sri Aurobindo. He further states, 'In the collective gnostic life the integrating truth-sense, the con-cording unity of gnostic nature would carry all divergences in itself as its own opulence and turn a multitudinous thought, action, feeling into the unity of a luminous life-whole.'¹⁵

- *Link to the Absolute*: The perfection of the higher stages of spiritual consciousness would involve necessarily the perfection of the lower stages. Like the Bodhisattva who refuses to enter into the final bliss of nirvana until and unless every sentient being

has attained salvation, the gnostic consciousness extends its hand for the lower grades of consciousness development to clasp onto and be pulled up into higher and greater realms of consciousness. Thus, the gnostic being acts as a link, in the chain of spiritual evolution, between nature and Supernature, or between the relative and the absolute. '...a formed race of higher humanity leading upwards the less evolved in a true fraternity born of the sense of the manifestation of the One Divine in all beings.'¹⁶

- *Bliss Infinite*: The sheer bliss of absolute being is the teleos toward which the evolutionary process is considered to be heading. 'The Supermind itself in the descending degrees of the manifestation emerges from the Ananda and in the evolutionary ascent merges into the Ananda.'¹⁷ The supersession of relativity, the breaking of natural and mental barriers self-imposed due to ignorance, the viewing of multiplicity from the standpoint of unity, the replacement of the ego with an all-embracing conscious awareness, can result in nothing but absolute bliss. And by this bliss is the gnostic consciousness characterised: 'A fulfilment of being in a luminous and blissful integration of its states and powers and their satisfied dynamic action would be the sense of the gnostic existence.'¹⁸

III. An outline of Nietzsche's philosophy

The difficulty in pinning down Nietzsche's philosophy is due to its self-conscious and purposeful elusiveness. F.C. Copleston explains in the seventh volume of his momentous *History of Philosophy*¹⁹ that according to Nietzsche all knowledge is merely a cover-up, a prop-show, a self-deceit to heal the wounds that life inflicts. So, all philosophy, including his own, must

necessarily be elusive. The same is also his opinion about ethics. All Christian morality, and mainly the ethics of humility, to him is nothing but a hidden will to power and control. Charity, pity, sympathy and so on are seen as profoundly negative forces with devious intentions behind a benign mask. All of thinking then serves the existential needs of our traumatic and wounded selves. This, he admits, is true even of his own philosophy which accounts for the constant contradictions found in his works, so much so that, the philosopher Karl Jaspers suggests that there is not a single thought in Nietzsche that he himself doesn't contradict somewhere.²⁰ The great Nietzsche scholar Wolfgang Muller-Lauter, however, states that contradiction is the very foundation of his thought and not something incidental to it.²¹

We can of course make some positive statements about his thought by making a small detour into the main thesis of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche's most important intellectual predecessor, whose ideas about nature, one could argue, were a precursor to Darwin's. In his magnum opus *The World as Will and Representation*, he argues that the whole of reality is but the flow and activity of Will. The Kantian thing-in-itself, the noumenon, that lies behind and manifests as phenomena is identified by Schopenhauer as this will, whose chief characteristic is that it is a will to live. Life, if we talk of vital beings, and existence, if we confine ourselves to the insentient realm, are at the root of the whole of reality, which he calls in German *Wirklichkeit*. Christopher Janaway translates this term as actuality,²² or as world-activity which to Schopenhauer is the sum of reality itself. Hints of the Darwinian vision of nature can be seen in this idea. The world merely is, and its function is merely to always be. That is all, there is no God, no purpose, no



supreme design, rhyme, rhythm or direction that can be ascribed to nature except that of the bare desire to exist, survive, live. Here is also to be found the roots of Schopenhauer's pessimism. Nature neither knows nor cares, it just wants to always be. And thus, the totality of meaningless suffering, for the sake of survival, far outweighs the totality of happiness in the world. From this follows an ascetic ethic, which aims at thwarting this will to life and to abnegate itself and thus revolt against nature's single purpose.

Nietzsche takes up the Will of Schopenhauer but ascribes to it a different ambit and goal: power. Nature exists for the augmentation of power and the weeding out of weak-

ness. What is true of nature must also be true of our actions and conduct and the evaluation we give to them. Thus, power to Nietzsche becomes the supreme value. He defines both good and evil at the beginning of his *Anti-christ* in these words:

'What is good? — Whatever augments the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself, in man.

What is evil? — Whatever springs from weakness.

What is happiness? — The feeling that power increases—that resistance is overcome.'

The Superman is the one who evaluates the world differently, more heroically, being beyond good and evil. His core ethical principle is that of power, valour, and unsympathetic and unflinching resoluteness. In the world of philosophy, something of the ideal of Sparta as opposed to Athens has been painted here.

IV. Nietzsche's Superman

Bertrand Russell defines him thus in his *History of Western Philosophy*, in the chapter on Nietzsche: 'His noble man—who is himself in day-dreams—is a being wholly devoid of sympathy, ruthless, cunning, cruel, concerned only with his own power.'²³ While Sri Aurobindo's supramental being, also a being beyond good and evil, is filled with an ineffably blissful feeling of oneness with the cosmos, Nietzsche's Superman is filled with universal indifference, and universal superiority in terms of power and dignity. He

Unlike the Superman who must look down from the heights of his mountains, as Nietzsche would put it, the Gnostic being passes beyond all dimensions, not by a negation of dimensions but by the grasp of that inner truth that expresses itself as these various dimensions and so is equally present in them all.

is a being of great powers and great wonders—powerful to the degree that his central function is to change the world itself. Because truth cannot be attained in any impersonal sense, and nature cannot be reconciled with, the task of the Superman is to overcome nature and to make his own truth. To change reality itself becomes his prodigious function.

The Superman as one end of the spectrum requires, logically, the existence of sub-man. The latter are to follow in the footsteps of the Supermen, and are to be sacrificed on the way to the grander task of world-revaluation and reconstruction. Following from the primacy of power, the Superman's ethic is that of the warrior. It is with the sword that the zest and joy of life must be celebrated—through all that is naturally noble in the human being: pride, courage, exploitation, hunger, glory, arrogance. Knowledge at

his hands is but an instrument at the service of power. This power that he is endowed with comes from within him, and is not to be attributed to mere adjustment to external circumstance as a Darwinian account would have it. He in fact criticises Darwin for having overrated the value of external environment in the arms race of the different species of organisms.²⁴ In his *Thus Spake Zarathustra* he says that mankind needs to be overcome and replaced by the Superman. Also, the present man is the in-between species between animal and Superman. So, the latter has been set at the high-

est rank, but what is the standard by which these ranks are determined? Greater consciousness, higher

awareness, superior moral perfection, as it would be in the case of a spiritual understanding? No. 'It is quanta of power, and nothing else, which determine and distinguish rank.'²⁵ How are men divided, what sort of rank is set between them? 'I distinguish between a type which represents the ascending life and a type which represents decadence, decomposition, weakness.'²⁶

The Superman then is a being of power, ruthless and even cruel. Unlike the Bodhisattva who wants all sentient beings' suffering to end, he doesn't want all men to evolve into the ranks of supermen. Just as the gullible is necessary for the charlatan to do his tricks, so does the superman need the submen, the mediocre, the weakling, the botched, to be used as the instruments and tools for the superior work of the higher race. An aristocratic value system shows itself behind the curtain, to the effect that the superman seems but



the subconscious idealisation of the Spartan aristocrat that the Nietzsche praised over all other types of people.

V. The Gnostic being and the Superman

A comparative discussion between these two ideals must begin with the observation that the Nietzschean superman who is supposed to be beyond good and evil is not beyond or transcendent to good and evil at all. Just like the anti-metaphysician who by the very act of denying metaphysics affirms it, by dabbling in a metaphysical rejection of metaphysics, so does the superman by going beyond good and evil, without a metaphysical realm to reside in, actually further enmeshes himself in good and evil. For the dichotomy of good and evil symbolises the plane of relativity which cannot be overcome by resorting to a higher form of relativity. A philosophy that does not accept an Absolute must thereby make the non-Absolute plane an Absolute, and thus make itself incapable of transcending it. The Gnostic consciousness thus is true to its claim in a way that the Nietzschean ideal cannot be. This is a crucial difference, for all other differences are but aspects of this one. In what way is the gnostic being of Sri Aurobindo beyond good and evil, and all other relative dichotomies?

Reality is a unity. In Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics, matter and spirit are but different aspects of the one. Matter is involved spirit and spirit is evolved matter. This unity that is reality, cannot express its unicity merely by a denial or suppression of its multiplicity. Yoga is that integration that is achieved through the concordance of that supposedly irreconcilable discord. The Spirit's complete suppression of matter leaves it at one end of the relation, as a one of two, as the sup-

pressor of the suppressed. Unlike the Superman who must look down from the heights of his mountains, as Nietzsche would put it, the Gnostic being passes beyond all dimensions, not by a negation of dimensions but by the grasp of that inner truth that expresses itself as these various dimensions and so is equally present in them all. This is his Yoga, his integral unification of the spirit with the world process.

It is primarily the ground of the Absolute that gives any coherence to the act of transcending relativity. And not just any limited conception of the Absolute, but the Absolute as Existence itself, Consciousness itself, Bliss itself. It is here that all division ceases, all discord is dissolved, all hunger for power reduced to child's play. In the flight of the One to the One, life need not be consciously asserted with effort, joy need not be squeezed out through Dionysus' ecstatic dancing, nor does power need be consciously augmented. For, in Ananda, need Ananda be searched for? What effort, what struggle, what conflict, what discord or disharmony, what jealousy or what cruelty can exist in the unicity of the All? To quote the Mandukya Upanishad, 'All this is Brahman immortal, naught else; Brahman is in front of us, Brahman is behind us, and to the south of us and to the north of us and below us and above us; it stretches everywhere. All this is Brahman alone, all this magnificent universe'.²⁷

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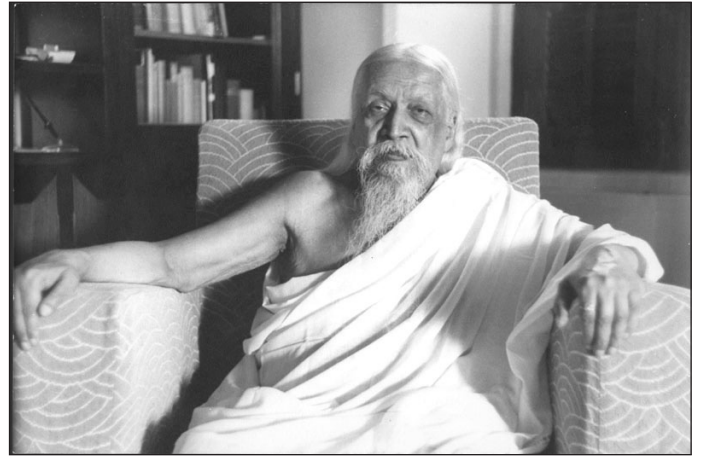
Source material

The aim of life: the Absolute

by Sri Aurobindo

First, we affirm an Absolute as the origin and support and secret Reality of all things. The Absolute Reality is indefinable and ineffable by mental thought and mental language; it is self-existent and self-evident to itself, as all absolutes are self-evident, but our mental affirmatives and negatives, whether taken separately or together, cannot limit or define it. But at the same time there is a spiritual consciousness, a spiritual knowledge, a knowledge by identity which can seize the Reality in its fundamental aspects and its manifested powers and figures. All that is comes within this description and, if seen by this knowledge in its own truth or its occult meaning, can be regarded as an expression of the Reality and itself a reality. This manifested reality is self-existent in these fundamental aspects; for all the basic realities are a bringing out of something that is eternal and inherently true in the Absolute; but all that is not fundamental, all that is temporary is phenomenal, is form and power dependent on the reality it expresses and is real by that and by its own truth of significance, the truth of what it carries in it, because it is that and not something fortuitous, not baseless, illusory, a vain constructed figure. Even what deforms and disguises, as falsehood deforms and disguises truth, evil deforms and disguises good, has a temporal reality as true consequences of the Inconscience; but these contrary figures, though real in their own field, are not essential but only contributory to the manifestation and serve it as a temporal form or power of its movement. The universal then is real by virtue of the Absolute of which it is a self-manifestation, and all that it contains is real by virtue of the universal to which it gives a form and figure.

The Absolute manifests itself in two terms, a Being and a Becoming. The Being is the fundamental reality; the Becoming is an effectual reality: it is a dynamic power and result, a creative energy and working out of the Being, a constantly persistent yet mutable form, process, outcome of its immutable formless essence. All theories that make the Becoming sufficient to itself are therefore half-truths, valid for some knowledge of the manifestation acquired by an exclusive concentration upon what they affirm and envisage, but otherwise valid only because the Being is not separate from the Becoming but present in it, constitutive of it, inherent in its



every infinitesimal atom and in its boundless expansion and extension. Becoming can only know itself wholly when it knows itself as Being; the soul in the Becoming arrives at self-knowledge and immortality when it knows the Supreme and Absolute and possesses the nature of the Infinite and Eternal. To do that is the supreme aim of our existence; for that is the truth of our being and must therefore be the inherent aim, the necessary outcome of our becoming; this truth of our being becomes in the soul a necessity of manifestation, in matter a secret energy, in life an urge and tendency, a desire and a seeking, in mind a will, aim, endeavour, purpose; to manifest what is from the first occult within it is the whole hidden trend of evolutionary Nature.

Therefore we accept the truth on which the philosophies of the supracosmic Absolute take their stand; Illusionism itself, even if we contest its ultimate conclusions, can still be accepted as the way in which the soul in mind, the mental being, has to see things in a spiritual-pragmatic experience when it cuts itself off from the Becoming in order to approach and enter into the Absolute. But also, since the Becoming is real and is inevitable in the very self-power of the Infinite and Eternal, this too is not a complete philosophy of existence. It is possible for the soul in the Becoming to know itself as the Being and possess the Becoming, to know itself as Infinite in essence but also as the Infinite self-expressed in the finite, the timeless Eternal regarding itself and its works in the founding status and the developing motion of Time-eternity. This realisation is the culmination of the Becoming; it is the fulfilment of the Being in its dynamic reality. This too then must be part of the total truth of things, for it alone gives a full spiritual significance to the universe and justifies the soul in manifestation; an explanation of things that deprives cosmic and individual existence of all significance cannot be the whole explanation or the solution it proposes the sole true issue.



The next affirmation which we put forward is that the fundamental reality of the Absolute is to our spiritual perception a Divine Existence, Consciousness and Delight of Being which is a supracosmic Reality, self-existent, but also the secret truth underlying the whole manifestation; for the fundamental truth of Being must necessarily be the fundamental truth of Becoming. All is a manifestation of That; for it dwells even in all that seem to be its opposites and its hidden compulsion on them to disclose it is the cause of evolution, on Inconscience to develop from itself its secret consciousness, on the apparent Non-Being to reveal in itself the occult spiritual existence, on the insensible neutrality of Matter to develop a various delight of being which must grow, setting itself free from its minor terms, its contrary dualities of pain and pleasure, into the essential delight of existence, the spiritual Ananda.

The Being is one, but this oneness is infinite and contains in itself an infinite plurality or multiplicity of itself: the One is the All; it is not only an essential Existence, but an All-Existence. The infinite multiplicity of the One and the eternal unity of the Many are the two realities or aspects of one reality on which the manifestation is founded. By reason of this fundamental verity of the manifestation the Being presents itself to our cosmic experience in three poises,—the supracosmic Existence, the cosmic Spirit and the individual Self in the Many. But the multiplicity permits of a phenomenal division of consciousness, an effectual Ignorance in which the Many, the individuals, cease to become aware of the eternal self-existent Oneness and are oblivious of the oneness of the cosmic Self in which and by which they live, move and have their being. But, by force of the secret Unity, the soul in becoming is urged by its own unseen reality and by the occult pressure of evolutionary Nature to come out of this state of Ignorance and recover eventually the knowledge of the one Divine Being and its oneness with it and at the same time to recover its spiritual unity with all individual beings and the whole universe. It has to become aware not only of itself in the universe but of the universe in itself and of the Being of cosmos as its greater self; the individual has to universalise himself and in the same movement to become aware of his supracosmic transcendence. This triple aspect of the reality must be included in the total truth of the soul and of the cosmic manifestation, and this necessity must determine the ultimate trend of the process of evolutionary Nature. (*The Life Divine, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vols. 21-22, pp. 684-687).

The role of the spirit

by the Mother

“As Mind is established here on a basis of Ignorance seeking for Knowledge and growing into Knowledge, so Supermind must be established here on a basis of Knowledge growing into its own greater Light. But this cannot be so long as the spiritual-mental being has not risen fully to Supermind and brought down its powers into terrestrial existence. For the gulf between Mind and Supermind has to be bridged, the closed passages opened and roads of ascent and descent created where there is now a void and a silence. This can be done only by the triple transformation to which we have already made a passing reference: there must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul instrumentation; on that or along with that there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of our subconscious; last, there must supervene the supramental transmutation,—there must take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the Supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature.” [*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 924]

What is the role of the spirit?

One might say that it is both the conscious intermediary between the Supreme and the manifestation, and the meeting-place of the manifestation with the Supreme.

Spirit is capable of understanding and communicating with the highest Godhead and at the same time it is the purest, one might say the least distorted intermediary of the highest Godhead in the outermost manifestation. It is spirit which, with the help of the soul, turns the consciousness towards the Highest, the Divine, and it is in the spirit that the consciousness can begin to understand the Divine. It might be said that what is called “spirit” is the atmosphere brought into the material world by the Grace so that it may awaken to the consciousness of its origin and aspire to return to it. It is indeed a kind of atmosphere which liberates, opens the doors, sets the consciousness free. This is what enables the realisation of the truth and gives aspiration its full power of accomplishment. From a higher standpoint, this could be put in another way: it is this action, this luminous and liberating influence that is known as “spirit”. All



that opens to us the road to the supreme realities, pulls us out from the mud of the Ignorance in which we are stuck, opens the doors to us, shows us the path, leads us to where we have to go—this is what man has called “spirit”. It is the atmosphere created by the Divine Grace in the universe to save it from the darkness into which it has fallen. The soul is a kind of individual concentration of this Grace, its individual representative in the human being. The soul is something particular to humanity, it exists only in man. It is like a particular expression of the spirit in the human being. The beings of the other worlds do not have a soul, but they can live in the spirit. One might say that the soul is a delegation of the spirit in mankind, a special help to lead it faster. It is the soul that makes individual progress possible. The spirit, in its original form, has a more general, more collective action. For the moment the spirit plays the part of a helper and guide, but it is not the all-powerful master of the material manifestation; when the Supermind is organised into a new world, the spirit will become the master and govern Nature in a clear and visible way. What is called “new birth” is the birth into the spiritual life, the spiritual consciousness; it is to carry in oneself something of the spirit which, individually, through the soul, can begin to rule the life and be the master of existence. But in the supramental world, the spirit will be the master of this entire world and all its manifestations, all its expressions, consciously, spontaneously, naturally. In the individual existence, that is what makes all the difference; so long as one just speaks of the spirit and it is something one has read about, whose existence one vaguely knows about, but not a very concrete reality for the consciousness, this means that one is not born into the spirit. And when one is born into the spirit, it becomes something much more concrete, much more living, much more real, much more tangible than the whole material world. And this is what makes the essential difference between beings. When that becomes spontaneously real—the true, concrete existence, the atmosphere one can freely breathe—then one knows one has crossed over to the other side. But so long as it is something rather vague and hazy—you have heard about it, you know that it exists, but... it has no concrete reality—well, this means that the new birth has not yet taken place. As long as you tell yourself, “Yes, this I can see, this I can touch, the pain I suffer from, the hunger that torments me, the sleep that makes me feel heavy, this is real, this is concrete...” (Mother laughs), that means that you have not yet crossed over to the other side, you are not born into the spirit.

(Silence)



In fact, the vast majority of men are like prisoners with all the doors and windows closed, so they suffocate, which is quite natural. But they have with them the key that opens the doors and windows, and they do not use it.... Certainly there is a time when they don't know they have the key, but long after they have come to know it, long after they have been told about it, they hesitate to use it and doubt whether it has the power to open the doors and windows or even that it is a good thing to open them! And even when they feel that “after all, it might be good”, there remains some fear: “What will happen when these doors and windows are opened?...” and they are afraid. They are afraid of being lost in that light and freedom. They want to remain what they call “themselves”. They like their falsehood and their bondage. Something in them likes it and goes on clinging to it. They still have the impression that without their limits they would no longer exist. That is why the journey is so long, that is why it is difficult. For if one truly consented to cease to exist, everything would become so easy, so swift, so luminous, so joyful—but perhaps not in the way men understand joy and ease. In truth, there are very few people who do not enjoy fighting. There are very few who could accept the absence of night, few can conceive of light except as the opposite of darkness: “Without shadows there would be no picture. Without struggle, there would be no victory. Without suffering there would be no joy.” That is what they think, and so long as one thinks in this way, one is not yet born into the spirit. (CWM, Vol. 9, *Questions and Answers 1957-58*, pp. 428-431)

When you open to the Spirit within you it brings you a first foretaste of that higher life which alone is worth living, then comes the will to rise to that, the hope of reaching it, the certitude that this is possible, and finally the strength to make the necessary effort and the resolution to go to the very end. First one must wake up, then one can conquer. (CWM, Vol. 9, *Questions and Answers 1957-58*, p. 420)



The poetry room

Man the enigma

A deep enigma is the soul of man.
His conscious life obeys the Inconscient's rule,
His need of joy is learned in sorrow's school,
His heart is a chaos and an empyrean.
His subtle Ignorance borrows Wisdom's plan;
His mind is the Infinite's sharp and narrow tool.
He wades through mud to reach the Wonderful,
And does what Matter must or Spirit can.
All powers in his living's soil take root
And claim from him their place and struggling right:
His ignorant creature mind crawling towards light
Is Nature's fool and Godhead's candidate,
A demigod and a demon and a brute,
The slave and the creator of his fate.

—Sri Aurobindo

The infinitesimal infinite

Out of a still immensity we came.
These million universes were to it
The poor light-bubbles of a trivial game,
A fragile glimmer in the Infinite.
It could not find its soul in all that Vast:
It drew itself into a little speck
Infinitesimal, ignobly cast
Out of earth's mud and slime strangely awake,—
A tiny plasm upon a casual globe
In the small system of a dwarflike sun,
A little life wearing the flesh for robe,
A little mind winged through wide space to run.
It lived, it knew, it saw its self sublime,
Deathless, outmeasuring Space, outlasting Time.

—Sri Aurobindo

Trance of waiting

Lone on my summits of calm I have brooded with voices
around me,
Murmurs of silence that steep mind in a luminous sleep,
Whispers from things beyond thought in the Secrecy
flame-white for ever,

Unscanned heights that reply seek from the inconscient
deep.
Distant below me the ocean of life with its passionate
surges
Pales like a pool that is stirred by the wings of a shadowy
bird.
Thought has flown back from its wheelings and stoopings,
the nerve-beat of living
Stills; my spirit at peace bathes in a mighty release.
Wisdom supernal looks down on me, Knowledge mind
cannot measure;
Light that no vision can render garments the silence with
splendour.
Filled with a rapturous Presence the crowded spaces of
being
Tremble with the Fire that knows, thrill with the might of
repose.
Earth is now girdled with trance and Heaven is put round
her for vesture.
Wings that are brilliant with fate sleep at Eternity's gate.
Time waits, vacant, the Lightning that kindles, the Word
that transfigures;
Space is a stillness of God building his earthly abode.
All waits hushed for the fiat to come and the tread of the
Eternal;
Passion of a bliss yet to be sweeps from Infinity's sea.

—Sri Aurobindo

The silver call

There is a godhead of unrealised things
To which Time's splendid gains are hoarded dross;
A cry seems near, a rustle of silver wings
Calling to heavenly joy by earthly loss.
All eye has seen and all the ear has heard
Is a pale illusion by some greater voice
And mightier vision; no sweet sound or word,
No passion of hues that make the heart rejoice
Can equal those diviner ecstasies.
A Mind beyond our mind has sole the ken
Of those yet unimagined harmonies,
The fate and privilege of unborn men.
As rain-thrashed mire the marvel of the rose,
Earth waits that distant marvel to disclose.

—Sri Aurobindo



Because of thy boon¹

Up in the skies,
In between the hanging splendour of the stars,
Night, frolicking glides.
Down here, the Neptunian waters roar—
My boat is anchored on the shore.
The sea beckons me with open, outstretched arms.
My heart trembles, impotent, stunned.
Inexperienced, new, my boat begins to dance,
In slow rhythmic swings of love.

“Have no fear”—

Thy assurance was clear.
Confident, I slip my boat upon the waves,
As on a mother’s fondling lap.

The mad sea heaving high,
Comes rushing to meet me
Weaving white garlands around
Of purest pearls chosen from the nether worlds.
My boat is now in midwaters cruised.
My eyelid is damp with drops of love.
The moon, queen of the skies, smiles.
The sea, the ship, the heart, the moon,
All rest on the same cosmic couch.

Just then, the heavens sunder;
Colossal clouds assail.
Gusty winds smash the chandelier stars.
The galloping ocean-fires
Destroy the sea’s daring dreams.
The moon, in a murky net, is trapped.
The waves gush in giant strides.
The heart bursts on the shores of gloom.
Under love’s guise
My fragile boat
Some sinner hand
To tempest tides has snared.

Then from the unknown ocean depths
Rises a thunder-peal of mystic drums
Breaking into a song.
Hope appears tearing the tenebrous void.
All my limbs thrill with joy.
I quit the steering wheel,
I wrench the anchoring chain,
I unfurl all the seven sails,
And then,
—I let her go!

She whizzes like an Arabian mare,
Urged by a fierce force of dancing life.
I leave my boat to play upon they lap,
For the words, a boon, are clear:

“HAVE NO FEAR.”

—Sundaram
trans. Dhanavanti

Untitled²

Not on this earth is what you seek:
Only to fall the roses blow,
The birds’ song fails, the stars that speak
In silence, lose their wandering glow;

Shadow reflections of the Above,
They veil their source and keep us bound
With strings of transient hope and love
To a cosmic play’s unending round.

Seeker, the flute of the Infinite
Calls you to his immortal flower
Of Beauty; at his luminous feet
Live through your soul’s eternal hour.

—Nirodbaran
(with Sri Aurobindo’s corrections)

Divine alchemy

My father! I love Thee.
Wilt Thou not accept my longing?
Fault after fault in me
Seeks Thy perfection.
Dark and dull is my nature,
Yet my soul is Thy fiery portion.
In search of Thy Reality
I have wandered from everywhere to everywhere.
High and low, in each man I find
Only Thy distorted reflection.
On my knees, with arms upraised
I invoke Thee,
“Lift me over Thy threshold
And by Thy alchemy of grace
Turn all my dross to god-gold.”

—Shyam Kumari



Rise, noble soul³

Rise, noble soul, and come away;
Let us no longer waste the day.
Come, let us haste to yonder hill,
Where pleasures fresh are growing still.
 The way at first is rough and steep,
 And something hard for to ascend;
 But on the top do pleasures keep,
 And ease and joys do still attend.

Come, let us go; and do not fear
The hardest way, while I am near.
My heart with thine shall mingl'd be;
Thy sorrows mine, my joys with thee.
 And all our labours as we go
 True love shall sweeten still,
 And strew our way with flowers too,
 Whilst we ascend the hill.

The hill of rest, where angels live:
Where Bliss her palace hath to give;
Where thousands shall thee welcome make,
And joy that thou their joys dost take.
 O come, let's haste to this sweet place,
 I pray thee quickly heal thy mind!
 Sweet, let us go with joyful pace
 And leave the baser world behind.

Come, let's unite; and we'll aspire
Like brighter flames of heavenly fire,
That with sweet incense do ascend,
Still purer to their journey's end.
 Two rising flames in one we'll be,
 And with each other twining play,
 And how, 'twill be a joy to see,
 We'll fold and mingle all the way.

—Thomas Traherne

What it really is

He strokes my hair with sunlight
and lays his palm before each step
so I may tread.

When he whispers in my ear,
the ocean dance begins,
flowing waves of abundance.

My heart is swelling
from the pain of fullness
and his smell in the air.

There is much to say
but tonight I am drunk
on the closeness of his face.

A word about this love:
every word I write will betray what it really is.

This poetry comes not from words,
only union.

—Navni Gujral

Immensities

I cast myself upon Thy open sea
There is nothing left but Thee.
Alone I am, and free.
The world and all its majesty
Has come and gone from me.

I give myself unto Thy infinite.
The slow sere anguish and the swift delight
That pace the earthly day and night
Gleam with a fitful light
To my disenchanted sight.

Unconsumed, I house Thy lucent fire;
Thy pure white flame that burns without desire.
Love's rising heat upon its living pyre
Shows nothing of its cherished warmth entire
That I admire.

Life's endless repetitions from me blown
By breaths of Thy immensities unknown,
Faith the marrow of my bone,
I stand with nothing of my own—
Moved by Thee alone.

—Loretta Shartsis

1. Sundaram, *In Awareness*, Ahmedabad: Sri Aurobindo Krupa Trust, 2014.
2. *Collected Poems of Nirodbaran with Sri Aurobindo's Comments and Corrections*, Vol. 1, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2015.
3. Alan Jacobs (Ed.) *Poetry for the Spirit*, London: Watkins, 2002.



Apropos

A simple, straight and sincere call and aspiration from the heart is the one important thing and more essential and effective than capacities. Also to get the consciousness to turn inwards, not remain outward-going is of great importance—to arrive at the inner call, the inner experience, the inner Presence. —Sri Aurobindo

To live within in a constant aspiration for the Divine enables us to look at life with a smile and to remain peaceful whatever the outer circumstances may be. —The Mother

The great thing in this world is not so much where you stand, but in which direction you are moving. —Oliver Wendell Holmes

Reflect upon your present blessings—of which every man has many—not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some. —Charles Dickens

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved. —Helen Keller

Nurture your mind with great thoughts. To believe in the heroic makes heroes. —Benjamin Disraeli

The difference between a successful person and others is not lack of strength nor a lack of knowledge but rather a lack of will. —Vince Lombardi

I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions. —Stephen Covey

Whoever loves much, performs much, and can accomplish much, and what is done in love is done well. —Vincent Van Gogh

Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others. —Winston Churchill

Anyone can hide. Facing up to things, working through them, that's what makes you strong. —Sarah Dessen

When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be. —Lao Tzu

If not us, who? If not now, when? —John F. Kennedy

Don't worry about failures, worry about the chances you miss when you don't even try. —Jack Canfield

Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending. —Carl Bard

Live each day as if your life had just begun. —Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

Things turn out best for people who make the best of the way things turn out. —John Wooden

An obstacle is often a stepping stone. —Prescott

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them. —John F. Kennedy

They are not poor that have little, but they that desire much. The richest man, whatever his lot, is the one who's content with his lot. —Dutch Proverb

You never know how strong you are... until being strong is the only choice you have. —Cayla Mill

Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts. —Winston Churchill

I have no regrets in my life. I think that everything happens to you for a reason. The hard times that you go through build character, making you a much stronger person. —Rita Mero

