

Collaboration

Spring 2018

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 43, No. 1



Earthquake by John Robert Cornell •

Aspiring for Integral Yoga by Kannappan Singaram

The First Nations and the soul of America, Part 4 by Karen Mitchell •

Two complementary perspectives on death and the afterlife by Larry Seidlitz •

The secret Will by James Anderson •

Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry room • Apropos



About the art on the front and back cover

Front cover: "Space" from the Edyanchavadi mural series on the five elements by Krupa Jhaveri and students. Back cover: "Hands of creativity" by Krupa Jhaveri. Please see Krupa's website, <http://www.sankalpajourneys.com>, for information about Krupa and her work within Auroville and internationally in the use of art for healing and growth.

The authors and poets

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

James Anderson (jamie_randers@hotmail.com) is a sadhak residing in Pondicherry, and one of the editors of NAMAHA, a journal on integral health published by the Sri Aurobindo Society.

Attar was a 12th-century Persian poet, theoretician of Sufis from Nishapur who had an immense and lasting influence on Persian poetry and Sufism.

Lord Byron (1788 – 1824) was an English nobleman, poet, peer, politician, and leading figure in the Romantic movement.

John Robert Cornell (johnrobt@cal.net) is a writer and workshop leader living in California. He is secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Association, and is associated with the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham.

Roger Harris is an Aurovilian poet who has published a book of poetry, *Alchemist of the Night*.

Lady Jean is an early Aurovilian poet featured in 50 Poems from Auroville.

John Keats (1795 – 1821) was one of the main Romantic poets, along with Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. He died from tuberculosis at age 25.

Lalla (a.k.a. Ise no Taifu) was a Japanese poet active in the early 11th century.

Anuradha (Majumdar) Legrand (<http://www.anumajumdar.com>) is an Aurovilian poet who has published two books of poetry, as well as Auroville, A city for the Future.

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 SASP in Lodi, CA.

Larry Seidlitz (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is the editor of Collaboration, edits books for other scholars, and conducts online courses and research on Integral Yoga.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822) one of the major Romantic poets, is regarded by some as among the finest lyric poets in the English language.

Kannappan Singaram (kansing2004@gmail.com), a software engineer living in California, considers himself as a beginner in Integral Yoga excited about meeting its challenges and opportunities.

Vikas (Alan Vickers) is an early Aurovilian now associated with AVI-UK. He recently published 50 Poems from Auroville, an anthology, available in print or at: <https://www.auro-ebooks.com/50-poems-from-auroville>.

Table of contents

Collaboration, Vol. 43, No. 1, Spring 2018

From the office of Collaboration

Notes on this issue..... 3

Current affairs

La Grace Sri Aurobindo Integral Life Center 4

Matagiri to host AUM 2018 4

Passings..... 5

AV almanac

A forecomer revisits Based on an interview with Bob Lawlor
..... by Alan and Vikas 5

Salon

Earthquake John Robert Cornell 8

Aspiring for Integral Yoga Kannappan Singaram 9

Chronicles

The First Nations and the soul of America, Part 4: The ancestors
and the future rhythm of consciousness Karen Mitchell 11

Essays

Two complementary perspectives on death and the afterlife
..... Larry Seidlitz 19

The secret Will James Anderson 30

Source material

Basics of Integral Yoga Sri Aurobindo 38

Taming the Vital The Mother 39

The poetry room

From The debate of Love and Death Sri Aurobindo 41

When I have fears that I may cease to be John Keats 42

From Mont Blanc Percy Bysshe Shelley 42

"Bright be the place of thy soul" Lord Byron 42

The newborn Attar (trans. Coleman Barks) 42

The soul, like the moon Lalla (trans. Coleman Barks) 43

In the silence of a moontide Roger Harris 43

To Phillippa Lady Jean 43

Fire Anuradha Legrand 43

Apropos 44



From the office of Collaboration

The artist

Krupa Jhaveri (krupa@auroville.org.in) is an Aurovilian and will be at AUM 2018. She is an artist, International Art Therapist and Art Director of Sankalpa: Art Journeys in Auroville. Born in the US and of Indian ethnic origin, Krupa is an Ambassador to India for Art Therapy Without Borders, with specialized research on the therapeutic experience of traditional and sacred Indian art forms including kolam, henna, embroidery, and mandalas.

In this issue, we begin with Current affairs, which presents news of the new Integral Life Center in Boulder, SC, as well as the upcoming AUM 2018 and the building projects at the Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in Mt. Tremper, NY. We also have news of the passings of two devotees in the US Sri Aurobindo community, Margo Maccloud and Mitra. This is followed by AV almanac, in which Bob Lawlor recounts his early experiences in Auroville, and his later work studying ancient Egyptian mysticism and the ancient Indian system of the Yugas, the four stages of the earth's development, based on an interview with Alan and Vikas.

In our Salon section, we have a short story by John Robert Cornell concerning meeting the Divine, and a prose-poem by Kannappan Singaram about his experience attending the recent annual Savitri Immersion at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, CA.

In Chronicles, we present the concluding fourth instalment of a multi-part article by Karen Mitchell on the First Nations and the soul of America. In Part 4, Karen explores the differences in consciousness of the indigenous First Nations people and the white people who settled and took over their lands, as well as their interactions, and the possibilities for their integration. She argues that a multimodal consciousness integrating the soulful, imaginal characteristics of the Native people with the rational, industrious character of white people is necessary for the realization of America's soul and its higher possibilities.

In Essays, Larry Seidlitz examines the nature of death and the experience of the afterlife prior to rebirth from the complementary viewpoints of Sri Aurobindo and Donald Neale Walsch, an American spiritual teacher. While the two viewpoints are similar, they emphasize different aspects of the process, and considered together provide a more vivid, comforting and positive account of the nature and process of death and the afterlife.

The second article, by James Anderson, concerns the nature of the true will, and its relation to the psychic being. James examines the distinction between the true will and the mental will in his own experience, together with their different effects on the body and the outer life.

In Source material, we have selections by Sri Aurobindo on the basics of Integral Yoga—particularly on the three yogas of action, knowledge, and devotion—and by Mother on controlling and purifying the vital nature. In the Poetry room, we have a number of poems related to the theme of death, and the inspiring quotations in *Apropos* on the back cover concern the same theme. Krupa Jhaveri's art enlivens the front and back 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 July 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

La Grace Sri Aurobindo Integral Life Center

We are pleased to announce the recent acquisition of a 300-acre estate and site of the La Grace Sri Aurobindo Integral Life Center, managed by Sri Aurobindo Center South East. In close proximity to Greenville, SC, the Center is an Integral Yoga spiritual retreat and educational center. It serves as a learning and experiential place for followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as seekers to come together in the exploration of Integral Yoga.

Our current facilities include a Welcome Center and Congregation Hall (see photos on right). Guest lodging and dining (capacity 75–100), fitness and yoga studio, multi-functional lecture hall and meditation room are planned over the next 12 months. As well, we will have a variety of floral gardens, an organic vegetable garden and a playground for children. Retreat guests may take advantage of many outdoor events, such as field sports, nature walks and lake activities.

The focal point of the La Grace Sri Aurobindo Integral Life Center will be a large meditation center and surrounding gardens inspired by the Matrimandir in Auroville. In addition to the meditation center, a Learning Center, Ayurvedic Wellness Spa and Activity Center are envisioned as Phase II additions.

If you are in the Greenville, SC area, please stop by and see us or join our Integral Yoga Circle on Sundays: an intimate gathering for the study, discussion and sharing on a variety of Integral Yoga topics and the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Please contact me should you have any questions or would like to visit us.

We will keep all Sri Aurobindo Centers updated on other scheduled programs, including our June 20–24th Sri Aurobindo Integral Yoga Retreat (see www.integralyogaretreat.com).

It is our sincere hope that the Center increases awareness of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the U.S., thereby benefiting all regional centers.

Radhe Pfau, Executive Director
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Matagiri to host AUM 2018

Since 2016, The Matagiri Board has continued its work to consolidate our land, preserve the existing infrastructure and to honor and carry forward the work of Matagiri's founders Sam Spanier (1925–2008) and Eric Hughes (1931–2016). As we approach Matagiri's 50th anniversary, in August 2018, we have undertaken a major project to provide new infrastructure at Matagiri in order to expand our capacity to host educational and cultural events, as well as to receive visitors, especially from the Ashram and Auroville. The new facility will allow us to offer talks, workshops, hatha yoga, music and dance (see photos on right).

Matagiri is set to celebrate its 50th birthday on August 2nd by hosting the All USA Meeting August 2nd–5th. The theme is "Art as a Bridge". A number of artist/sadhaks will offer opportunities to use the arts to go within. The new buildings of the center will be dedicated with a Saturday afternoon performance of Indian Classical music. Members of the Foundation for World Education and Auroville International USA Boards will be participating as well as Aurovilians Krupa (from Sankalpa Art Journeys) and Aviram Rozin (from Sadhana Forest). Scholarships are available. For details and registration, visit <https://matagiri.org/events/all-usa-meeting-aum-2018/>



Passings

Margo Wallace MacLeod, a longtime devotee and member of the Foundation for World Education Board as well as the White Rose Foundation, died on Monday April 2nd in Austin, Texas. Most recently Margo was teaching "Awareness Through the Body" in the US and Canada. Her young students in Austin referred to her class as "Jedi Training."

Margo was a graduate of Wheaton College, the University of Hawaii and received her Ph.D. from Yale. She taught at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont where she was beloved by her students. She is survived by her partner, Mary Christopher, and her brothers Norman and Scott MacLeod.

Maury (Mitra) Lamb was a member of Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, California along with his wife, Gaia. He was a student of Eriksonian hypnosis and the work of Virginia Satir. He and Gaia both had a deep interest in healing and presented workshops. At the All USA Meeting they presented on "Cooperative inquiry, a tool for the evolution of group consciousness." Mitra assisted Nirodbaran, one of Sri Aurobindo's oldest disciples, at the end of Nirod's life. Mitra died on Easter Sunday, April 1st in Sedona, Arizona.



AV almanac

A forecomer revisits

Reprinted from Auroville Today, February 2018.

From an interview with Bob Lawlor by Alan and Vikas, with additional material from the internet.

Bob and Deborah Lawlor established Forecomers, the first community in Auroville, in 1968. They left in 1972, to work on the translation of a book on ancient Egypt, "The Temple of Man". When Bob returned for a visit recently, he spoke about his early Auroville experience as well as his subsequent research into ancient Egyptian mathematics, sacred geometry and the Yugas.

Journey and arrival

I came to South India and met Mother totally by chance. I left New York in the late 1960s because I made the decision to use urethane foam as a sculpting material. It worked very well, but the fumes from the process were toxic and I had to radically detoxify through fasting.

I decided to get out of the city for a while and travel. I finally arrived by boat in Madras.

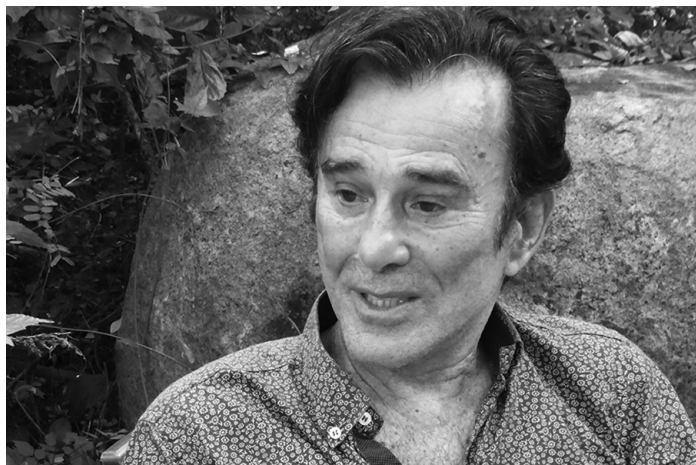
I wanted to study yoga and at the Theosophical Society I was told that the best place to study it was Sri Aurobindo's Ashram in Pondicherry. After a terrible bus journey, I arrived.

It was not an easy entry. Whoever I spoke to started talking about someone called 'The Mother'. As a New Yorker in the 1960s, everybody was seeing a psychiatrist and learning about the 'mother complex', so you can imagine how I felt. At the same time, I really liked the feeling at the samadhi.

One day, I got a big scorpion bite and had a blood poisoning reaction. The hospital told me I needed a shot of penicillin but, because I was on a health diet, I refused. Somebody informed Mother about this. She told him to tell me to go to America House, lie down on a bed and concentrate upon her photograph.

I did that and towards late afternoon the swelling opened and drained out. That's when I understood who The Mother was!

I hadn't actually met her yet: all the communications were through a sadhak, Udar. Mother then suggested that I



go and live on Ananta's Island, which was quite remote, because local people were coming to me daily with wounds to be dressed. Mother said there is nothing we can do now about the wounds of India. It would be much better if you concentrate on your own inner life and the wounds that are there.

The first time I actually met her, I saw shoots of light going out from her. I couldn't understand what was happening so I turned round and walked out. When Udar asked her what she thought of me, she said she didn't know because she had only seen the back of my head!

But I saw Mother again. She told me to return to the United States because I had attachments and if I went back, they would dissolve. But if I stayed in the Ashram, she said, they would have to be severed and that would be painful. Then she gave me a flower that, she said, is especially for you.

Downstairs, I was told she had named this flower for the new city of Auroville. I guess that was an indication of what was ahead of me.

One of the people I met on my first visit to Pondicherry was Andre Vandemburgh. He had studied ancient Egyptian mathematics with R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz whose masterwork, *The Temple of Man*, was based upon a 12-year study of the great temple of Amun-Mut-Khonsu at Luxor. I became interested and began studying with Andre.

When I had to go back temporarily to New York because my mother was ill, I continued my studies with him. I also met Deborah, who became my partner. I told her I had to return to India. In spite of having a successful career, she decided to come and Mother agreed.

Out to Auroville

We returned to the Ashram. One day Deborah said we should go and look at land where there were plans to build a city. We cycled up the coast road, then walked up a sandy

canyon. When we got to the top, we looked around and everywhere was just so beautiful, so empty and so pure.

We told Mother we would like to try and live out there and she told us to go ahead. She wanted someone to be there because there were lots of great plans but nobody was actually living there at that time.

This is because it was beautiful but very challenging. There were snakes and huge scorpions; every step you took you had to be careful. There was no road, no water or electricity...and here we were, two people from New York City!

Roger Anger, Auroville's architect, designed something for us but it was not possible to construct it immediately. So I looked at the way the village people built things and realised that I had a lot to learn from them. I had to learn about the past before I could learn anything about the future of this place.

So we ate like the villagers, we wore similar clothing, we learned how to farm the land and dig a bore well. It was hard work—our first bore well collapsed, as did a dam that we built to prevent land washing away—but we stuck it out.

Although we were living at a very elemental level, we started doing experiments with the kind of house we wanted to live in and with growing our own food. I had already been involved with the ecology movement in the States and this was an opportunity to express all that.

I started experimenting with my own diet and eventually this led to us growing and eating algae, which is very high in vitamin A.

When I returned to Auroville, people like Francis were handling Forecomers much better than I ever did so I decided to focus upon my Egyptian studies. We were living in India and studying ancient Egypt and this enormous cross-fertilization of traditions gave new shape and meaning to our lives. I realized I could not live by ideals alone, I had to involve myself in ideas. So in 1972 we decided to leave Auroville to pursue our studies in more depth.

I left not because I was disappointed in Auroville but because I wanted to bring another level of consciousness to the experiment. I didn't think that living physically in Auroville was the only way to live it: I thought you could live anywhere in a consciousness that would assist the creation of a new society.

My only reservation about how Auroville was developing was I thought we were getting stuck: we were building little places and saying this is 'my' place, which I thought was opposite to what we were meant to be doing. We were using our success in establishing Auroville to build our egos.

I was also concerned that the larger India was extremely attracted by mechanistic and technological solu-



tions that were already proving to be an environmental and psychophysical failure.

The world of ancient Egypt and the *yugas*

When we went back to the United States, we lived remotely with Andre at first, then we started going to France every year to check with Lubicz's step-daughter our translation work on *The Temple of Man*.

This was our entry into the mind of ancient Egypt. It took me 8 ½ years to fully understand it.

At the temple of Luxor, the various sections of the human body are incorporated into the proportions of the temple except for the top part of the head, the cerebral cortex, because up there are the neurological changes, the ones that are responsible for our present materialistic, manipulative approach to nature.

Sri Aurobindo talks about the 'lid' of mind. Below the lid, the mind functions in a certain limited way but above one can view time from a timeless perspective.

This was an important idea for the Egyptians, but the idea that time becomes the timeless is also one of the important elements in the ancient Indian conception of time, which is based upon the '*yugas*'. The *yugas* succeed each other almost endlessly. The Golden Age, or *Satya Yuga*, is the first age when we live in absolute attunement with the natural world. A decline marks the succeeding *yugas* until the Iron Age, or *Kali Yuga*, which everyone agrees is the time we are living in now, where we have turned over the natural forces in the world to a mechanistic technological science. At the end of the cycle, Kalki is said to take birth and reestablish righteousness, thus beginning a new *Satya Yuga*.

The notion of *Yugas* also underlies Greek cosmology—the idea expressed by Plato and Pythagoras as "the Ages of Man"—and similar concepts appeared when I studied Australian Aboriginal culture.

It is important to understand this because, unless one knows the governing principles of the time period in which one lives, one cannot explain or understand anything about the forces that drive our collective and individual lives.

The *yuga* in which we are living now brings a vast circle of time to completion. According to the scholar Alain Daniélou, who lived in India and whose book was translated by Deborah, the real essence of Indian philosophy is that we are on the threshold of a huge transformation in time—we are nearing the end of a final *yuga* in a cycle of *yugas*. It will mean a disintegration, followed by a period of rest in the cosmic creation for 60,000 years. Because of what we have done to the earth, it will probably take that long for this system to recover!

Mother mentions that Théon, her teacher of occultism in Algeria, said there would not be another pralaya or cosmic dissolution, but he was basing this upon his reading of the Kabbalah and the Chaldeans. The correct translation from the Indian Puranas, which had been written down some 6,000 years ago, had not been done at this time.

We cannot avoid cosmic dissolution at the end of this *yuga*, but I do not see it as a bad thing. Destruction is also a form of purification. It gives us a fresh start and a new way to do what Mother said to me, which is to dissolve one's attachments.

The one thing that is not destroyed is consciousness. And this is where Sri Aurobindo and Mother's work on the supramental consciousness fits in. A new form of our species will come next.

While we cannot avoid dissolution, we can prepare for the next Golden Age in our thoughts. We can imagine some of the modifications that could make this species into something that is more successful in maintaining the entire livingness of the earth. The aborigines were aware of this dreaming responsibility, and through their dreaming they were able to maintain a continuous culture for 60,000 years.

Auroville today

This is the first time I have returned to Auroville for an extended visit for many years. I made a brief visit soon after the Matrimandir was completed and I was very happy because I thought if this is happening, the rest will straighten itself out.

I think there are some terrific things here and others that are hanging on to the past. There is this problem about the influence of money, and I was disappointed by the extreme size and luxury of living of some people. But I got used to the way that Mother thinks about this kind of thing, which is that one can't lift one part by repressing another. We've got to let them both be expressed, see how they interact and then go on from there.

Overall, I'm very positive about the Auroville of today. It has not yet realised the dream, but it is certainly something that is not erasable any more. Now the concept of a society based on these principles must happen in a more dispersed way, or else the world is not going to change.

After leaving Auroville, Bob wrote a number of books. In addition to his influential translation of 'The Temple of Man', they include Voices of a New Day, Awakening in the Aboriginal Dream Time, and his latest, The Geometry of the End of Time, based upon the Indian concept of the Yugas.



Salon

Earthquake

by John Robert Cornell

He couldn't remember where he met her, but he did remember what happened. They had just been introduced when she startled him with a question.

"Have you ever met God?"

"Yeah... I know about God." He was feeling a little irritated at her question. He suddenly felt dumb, as if a space had opened up in front of him and he was about to fall into it, probably on his face. He had quickly changed the question hoping that she wouldn't notice.

"Have you ever *met* God?" She repeated the question with a slight change of emphasis. She was staring at him and there didn't seem to be anyone in those eyes. There was a dark light there, like you might see in a cat's eyes if the reflection was just right. But this wasn't really a reflection. Rather it was like looking into softly illuminated empty space, the space he was about to fall into... had already fallen into. His stomach was tight. He was trying to catch hold of something to stop the fall. There was a rushing in his ears and he couldn't think straight. Jokes came to his mind, images of shaking hands: "Glad to meet you, God." God was tall and was wearing a red tie.

"Uh, what do you mean?" He was stalling for time. He had always used this ruse. Get the other person talking till he could recover his train of thought. He suddenly noticed that he was struggling with her. He felt that he was about to lose... something in the struggle. What? His self-possessed sense of superiority? A certain amused air that he took around others that reassured him that he was indeed smarter than they? Confidence that he was in control of the situation?

"I mean have you ever met God," she said for third time as if the question were self-explanatory. She was very calm. Then, "I've just met you. Once you meet someone you know him. Not all of him, but the individual is no longer imaginary. 'Come face to face with.'"

"Well, I never thought of it that way." He was still stalling. He felt like he was in a mine field or walking on melting ice. Was it going to explode in his face or give way beneath him? He thought maybe she knew something that he didn't.

"Well, meeting someone is not a thought," she replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

He groaned inwardly. The pieces of the picture that he was trying to hold together (himself?) broke into jigsaw fragments and flew apart in 37 directions.

I fled him down the nights and down the days. I fled him down the borders of the years. I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind. And in the midst of tears and under running laughter...

He didn't know why those words were running through his mind. His chest was hurting and his breath was short. He wanted to scream at her. He *was* screaming at her. Inside. A long scream had been hiding behind that jigsaw puzzle all along. He screamed at her, but she wasn't there any more. The scream just kept hitting a wall and bouncing back at him. In every direction it hit a wall and bounced back. It was like being in a cave. With no opening. Every act was a boomerang. Walls on every side. He was surrounded. Imprisoned.

Finally he looked. He opened his eyes and looked at the hole, the abyss he had been trying to avoid falling into.

"No!" he screamed at her. (She wasn't there.) "No, I haven't! I WON'T!" And every peak and valley of that cry, every overtone, every aching blade of it, every bolt of force in it carried such a black load of loneliness, such an essence of despair. It was a thousand rats leaving a sinking ship. It hurtled out of him like a cannon.

And then he was falling. The scream died away. He had looked, and he was falling, spent. All the battle gone. Falling like... a leaf. Falling like... more like drifting down than falling. Something was gathering around him like an invisible cushion.

He opened his eyes.

She was still there, watching him. (How long had he been standing there with his eyes closed?) Or something "behind" her, something in that non-reflective light in her eyes was regarding him.

Oh, with such an infinity of tenderness!

Welcome, it said. I have been waiting on you for a long time.

You must gather yourself within more firmly. If you disperse yourself constantly, go out of the inner circle, you will constantly move about in the pettinesses of the ordinary outer nature and under the influences to which it is open. Learn to live within, to act always from within, from constant inner communion with the Mother. It may be difficult at first to do it always and completely, but it can be done if one sticks to it—and it is at that price, by learning to do that that one can have the siddhi in the Yoga. —Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga III*, p. 227.



Aspiring for Integral Yoga

by Kannappan Singaram

*On the author's experience of the annual Savitri Immersion
at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in February 2018*

I joined six to make it seven
For the seventh Savitri Immersion.
After checking-in and feasting,
The Savitri Sojourn began.

In submission at the divine feet
Of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo
Seeking Their Blessings
To meet life's demands
In a fragmented concentration
And surrender, I joined the Immersion.

The logistics and guidance were set
Meditative bells invoked Their Presence
Bringing silence to the mind of seven.
A sweet and soft voice began
By reading the Author's Note, reminding us
That "The characters are not mere allegories."
And then "It was the hour before the Gods Awake."
Slow and steady, brisk and swift, soft and high-pitched,
Taking turns, passing the baton, the cantos were read.
Savitri's waking among the tribes
Satyavan's destined day of passing
The multitudinous planes of existence
Warmed up the seven for the yoga of Earth.

Call it the blues of the 40s
Or the complexities of life,
Interrupted sleep and nightmares,
"Vision and Boon" deprived,
Mental constructs and old energies
Had taken me hold, building dark castles.
Going everywhere yet still at square one,
I was accustomed to the stress of life.

The rhythmic lines of *Savitri*
Brought stillness to my noisy mind.
The eager mind brooded on the chance to read,
While the calm mind brooded on lines that were read.

Swinging between eager mind and calm mind,
Offering personnel prayer in between,
Pivoting the focus back to the lines read,
The finer vibrations of the Yurt
Worked their way through and penetrated me.
Inspiring verses from "The Yoga of the Soul's Release"
brought expansion.
"The Secret Knowledge" was a nectar of flowing Golden
Grace
Opening secret doors that revealed treasures of the
psychic realm.
In the sanctum of the Yurt, amid a Guiding Presence,
Verses of a deeper significance filled the air.
"The Spirit's Freedom and Greatness" peeled off a layer of
ego
Purifying layers of the physical and subtle bodies.
"The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds" opened new
insights
That were hidden in a thick sheet of ignorance and habit.
We climbed the golden stairways of "The Traveler of the
Worlds"
And plunged headlong into "The Descent into Night"
Which revealed the inconscient in a new light.

A worldview was embedded deep inside my brain,
An average human who favors good over bad,
A guardian of relative truth, a denouncer of relative false-
hood,
Eighteen years of perspective are hard to leave,
Losing equality and balance, I struggled to come to terms
with life.

On Day Two a severe headache held me till noon.
The Lord's "Descent into Night"
Reminded me of our inconscient base.
In "The World of Falsehood and the Mother of Evil"
I recognized our inconscient base;
Its transformative scope grew clear,
And a new perspective was clarified.
I saw Love on the horizon planting seeds of love.
As my headache slowly relieved,
A sense of peace descended on my head.
My body felt as thin as a leaf,
A sense of peace penetrated my nerves
And at this moment, I offered it to the Grace.
From then on, a thought of steady light
Glowing on a shiny oval stone
Kept visiting me, soothing body, mind and spirit.



The Fear which haunts mankind
Always kept me far away from dogs.
So when Rishi and Amba, the Ashram dogs,
Came rushing to me in a playful mood
My nerves quivered even as I stood my ground
Pretending to be courageous.
When Rishi leaped onto my chest
I chased away my fear and engaged with him.
When Rishi swirled his tongue licking me
Never had I experienced such raw force.
My heart beat fast each time
I shuttled between the Ashram and the Yurt.
Whether sweet Rishi and Amba sensed my fear or not,
They both walked ahead of me
Leading me to the yurt time after time.
I felt inadequate to their playful, repetitive mood.
With due respect to them, I reconciled my fear
And consciously stayed calm with them,
Thanking their behavior towards me.

Saturday afternoon brought gusty winds
Dashing and uplifting the yurt;
It rose like a spiraling castle.
The *Savitri* reading proceeded briskly.
By Saturday evening, my tendency
To read my favorite cantos receded.
Pre-meditative expectations left my shores for good.
I remained open to the moment guided by inspiration.
Thus was I prepared by hidden Guiding Hands
While reading "The Book of the Divine Mother."

"The Adoration of the Divine Mother,"
A canto I read regularly at home,
Reminded me that this yoga
Is the Mother's yoga, not mine.
Its powerful lines turned me inward:
"A Stillness Absolute, Incommunicable,"
"In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power,"
"Her clasp shall turn to ecstasy our pain."
As I travelled deeper within
New experiences began to emerge.
An effortless thought or vision kept coming:
"A shining stone with a steady golden light,"
Bringing joy and peace, renewing me,
Breaking layers of old energy,
Pouring layers of new energy.
I stayed calm, offering
My imperfect offering to the Mother.

The concluding day found me sleeping sound.
Eighteen months of continuous nightmares had stopped.
A peaceful dreamless sleep gave contentment.

During Sunday's reading of books four through eight
Thoughts of "a shining stone with a steady golden light"
came often.
"The Book of Love" brought the Two who are One together,
Awakening the eternal dancer among the seven:
Everyone's face turned a translucent glow.
Narad's arrival, Savitri's revelation of love,
King Aswapathi's yogic posture and probing,
Narad's dialectic announcing
Satyavan's death in 12 swift months,
The Queen's emotional appeal to nature's injustice,
Were read with velvet voice and rapturously heard by all.

Satyavan's death, Savitri's silence,
The beginning of Savitri's yoga,
Emanations of the Divine Mother in "The Triple Soul-
Forces,"
Savitri's responses and promises to the Divine Mother
Carrying the reconciling, transformational, integral
power,
Give the reader a glimpse of the possibilities
When the psychic being is brought forward.
A shining stone with a steady golden light.

Sri Aurobindo's persuasive poetry,
Through Savitri's dialog with the Lord of Death,
Moved us all and a deeper adoration filled us.
A shining stone with a steady golden light
Appeared in effortless thoughts bringing peace
And a new perspective on life.

During the concluding canto, the seven in unison,
In silent adoration, formed a psychic golden chain.
There was a new perspective of love,
A new perspective of receptivity,
A new perspective of letting go
In the new light of transformation,
A new perspective of detachment,
Not with indifference, but with calmness.
Realizing the work that lay ahead
In practicing this Integral Yoga,
I returned home in gratitude
To begin with Love
The journey of transformation.



Chronicles

The First Nations and the soul of America

Part 4: The Ancestors and the Future Rhythm of Consciousness

by Karen Mitchell

I. Introduction

This is the last of a series of four articles on the First Nations and the Soul of America. Writing these articles has helped me engage with the soul of my country and having them published in *Collaboration* has allowed me to share what I have learned from this engagement. I am grateful to Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and to the Integral Yoga community for seeing the possibility of being engaged with the soul of our nation. I am grateful to Wolfgang Aurose (Schmidt-Reinecke) and Soleil Aurose (Lithman) for creating and sharing a framework and a method for doing this. Here, as the writer of this series, I would also like to thank John Robert Cornell for his willingness to read the draft of all four articles and for his pointed and invaluable comments and suggestions.

As I set out to do a brief re-cap before beginning the fourth article, I was struck by the continuity of the previous three with the last one. Though I knew in general the themes I wanted to cover in each article, the flow between the articles was not something I consciously orchestrated. It was, however, appreciated in hindsight.

I began in the first article laying a foundation for the entire series. This foundation drew on the thought and



writings of Sri Aurobindo and their contemporary elaboration in the thought and writings of Wolfgang Aurose (Schmidt-Reinecke). Wolfgang sees the modern political nations as being based on reason and promoting individual development. He contrasted these nations with what he called the “cultural-mythical” nations which emphasize connection and relation. These two types of nations I described as different modalities of consciousness. The America founded in the eighteenth century was a modern political nation. Its soulful foundation, however, is largely formed by the cultural-mythical nations of the First People who have been here for thousands of years. The latter part of the first article touches upon the growing visibility and appreciation of the First Nation communities and their culture in America.

The second article, written after the November elections in 2016, is sub-titled: “Journey From Mind to Psychic Being.” It began with describing an experience I had shortly after the November, 2016 elections. That experience was described as a pushing out of my ordinary sense of the body by the swelling of a “field-presence.” Later, I saw this swelling as caused by the joining of America’s soul with mine. I also shared what I was touched by during my meditative readings of

a few of the significant documents of America’s history. The writings of Sri Aurobindo about both the creative necessity of individualism and its limits and dangers acted as a lens. I was also inspired by his description of the coming of a new age of “subjectivism.” He describes subjectivism as “the discovery that man is inwardly a soul and a conscious power of the Divine.” I ended the article by suggesting that the First Nations, in their cultural support of the psychic being, had prepared and were preparing the ground for the coming age.

The subtitle of the third article was “The Necessity and Gifts of Collective Grief.” In this article I shared passages in *Savitri* which indicated that Sri Aurobindo saw grief as a beginning stage in the discovery of soul. This was seen as also applying to the nation as a whole. A nation can begin to find its soul through grief. Speaking of America as a whole, we have often avoided grief, and in doing so, missed opportunities for discovering and engaging with America’s soul. This article drew on the writings of Martín Prechtel who was nourished by both Pueblo and Mayan cultures. He speaks from an indigenous perspective on the necessity and nature of grief.

To sum up before heading into the fourth article: America embraces two very different modalities of consciousness. These two can rather awkwardly be described as Mental/Individualistic (European) and Psychic/Connective (First Nations). In the first couple of centuries following the founding of America as a political Nation based on reason, these two modalities of consciousness were often perceived and experienced by many as antagonistic each to the other. However, since the last century, things have begun to change. The possibility of integration and harmonization is now on the horizon.



A New Vision

Could I once see the day that whites and reds were all friends, it would be like getting new eye sight.

—Piamingo, Chickasaw¹

When white people made their appearance in the western part of this country, it was believed by some First Nation people that the Wa-gas were returning. The Wa-Gas were the ancient ancestors who were thought to have gone north or into the hidden places of the world. Their supposed return was welcomed with great rejoicing because it meant the beginning of an age of renewal.

But soon the sad mistake was discovered, to our sorrow, when the men began to debauch our women, give whiskey to our men, and claim our land that our forefathers had inhabited for so many thousands of years... We no longer termed them as Wa-gas, but as Ken-e-ahs, which means foreigners, who had no right to the land and could never appreciate our kindness, for they were a very different people from the Wa-gas. They had corrupt morals that brought dissolution upon our people and wrought the horrors of untold havoc.

—Lucy Thompson, Yurok²

Unfortunately, many of the first white people that showed up in the western part of the continent were prospectors—desperate seekers of gold and other precious metals. While the hope that white people were the returning ancestors was quickly abandoned in the west, in other parts of the country there were some First Nation people who sensed that the white people from across the sea bore

something of value to their world and they were not as quickly disillusioned by them. Whatever the white people bore, however, eventually seemed inextricably bound up with an inability to see, respect, and connect with what was around them. They polluted and damaged the land, killed animals in large numbers, and dislocated and mistreated people. In the west, the white man went from being Wa-Gas, the returning and renewing ancestors, to Ken-e-ahs, the foreigners. It wasn't only that the white people seemed foreign or different from them, but that they often appeared restless and hungry. They frequently left a path of destruction wherever they went.

Still, for a few First Nation people, individuals like Piamingo who was quoted at the beginning of this article and Ohiysea whose story will be briefly told below, that sense of possibility upon contact with white people remained despite the destruction that so often followed in their wake. Piamingo, Ohiysea and other First Nation people believed that if the white man chose to learn from the ways of the red man, that spark within him could become something life-giving. Then the red man as well as the white man would benefit.

As I was trying to imagine what Piamingo and Ohiysea felt and intuited, I came across this wonderful passage written by Robert Sardello. It was part of his introduction to a remarkable little book on the spiritual nature of matter:

The basis of this writing is contact with the Power of Potentia. It is the ever present, real presence of what could be that is in union with every particle of what is. It is the presence of the "coming into being," of "possibility" within the actual. When these two dimen-

*sions are seen and inwardly felt as one, we have entered into the power of Love. Love is the united activity of the Power of Potentia in conjunction with the actual.*³

I believe that what some First Nation individuals saw and felt in the white immigrants from across the sea was the presence of the "possible." Tragically, this sense of the possible in white people was nearly severed from the "actual" and completely dominated it. This produced a lack of humility and gratitude in white people and bent them towards a demeaning of First Nation cultures. In that demeaning, the basis of reciprocal learning was unfortunately undercut. When white people showed respect for some individuals coming from First Nation cultures, it led some to hope that greater understanding and appreciation of their cultures would follow. That hope considerably dimmed with greater contact with the white man. I think we see this played out in the life and work of Ohiysea.

Ohiysea, also known as Charles Alexander Eastman,⁴ was born in the winter of 1858 in southern Minnesota. He was a member of the Dakota, or Sioux, nation. Shortly after his birth, his mother died and his paternal grandmother and her family took him in. When he was four Ohiysea's father, Many Lightnings, and his older sibs were swept up in an uprising over unjustly withheld provisions. They were presumed captured and killed. Ohiysea's grandmother took Ohiysea and fled with her family into Canada. For 11 years Ohiysea lived the traditional nomadic life of his people. He learned herbal medicine from his grandmother and from his uncle he received training as a hunter and warrior.

When he was 15, Ohiysea's father reappeared in white man's clothes to



take him to the Dakota territory where he had a small plot of farmland. His father had changed his name to Eastman and said he had converted to Christianity. He sent Ohiysea off to a white, Christian school. Ohiysea rebelled until his father told him that this was the new way of being a warrior. Though his grandmother was opposed to him entering the world of the white people, Ohiysea believed his grandmother's saying: "When you see a new trail, or a footprint you do not know, follow it to the point of knowing,"⁵ applied to this new experience of the white world. Ohiysea describes his entering the white, "civilized" world as going to the "spirit world." It was an experience of dying to all he had known.

Ohiysea would spend 17 years in school, including Dartmouth College and Boston University where he earned a medical degree. He accepted Christianity, seeing no incompatibility between the Jesus of the Gospel and his people's tradition, and changed his name to Charles Alexander Eastman. His life's work was attempting to lay a bridge between the white European culture and the "ways of the People." He thought introducing and sharing some of the training he had received as a boy and a young man would be a way to do this. He established many YMCA's on First Nation reservations where the culture and ways of the people were being lost. He was a consultant for both Boy Scouts of America and the Campfire Girls, and he and his wife ran their own camp for children for many years. These were all efforts to teach the young the ways of the indigenous people. Ohiysea wrote several eloquent books describing the education, world view, culture and experience of First Nation peoples, and shared these at various forums throughout the United States as well as overseas.

As a young man, Ohiysea had become fascinated and enthralled with the inventions of the white, civilized world and with Christianity which offered a global, unitive perspective. But while the civilized world had opened up many creative opportunities for him as an individual and though he had met some extraordinary and kind individuals, as time went on he grew more disillusioned with civilization and more appreciative of his First Nation culture. He came to believe that white civilization and Christianity were incompatible and that forming a bridge between the ways of his people and white civilization was a more formidable task than he had realized.

Even though he had come to believe that white civilization was, at heart, 'a system of life based on trade,' he still felt that it was the task of the best people, both Indian and non-Indian, to help America find a shared vision.⁶

Can there truly be a bridge between cultures that honor and celebrate connection with what is near and around them, and a civilization attracted to the possible? They seem opposed on many counts, almost the reverse of each other. Can the "eyesight" and vision metaphor that Piamingo and Ohiysea used help us? Normal human eyesight involves two eyes, not one. Using two eyes gives us a wider vision by about 30 degrees and also gives us a greater capacity for depth perception. Could the eye that sees the actual and the eye that sees the possible befriend each other, cross over into each other's field—as do the optic nerves in the brain—and learn to work together to increase both wideness and depth of vision in the human being?

II.

The Presence of the Ancestors

And when the last red man shall have perished from the earth and his memory among white men shall have become a myth, these shores shall swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children shall think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the woods, they will not be alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude. At night, when the streets of your cities and villages shall be silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled and still love this beautiful land.

—Sealth (Seattle), Duwamish⁷

For thousands of years before the coming of the mentalized European, people were living here in soulful, imaginal relations with sky and earth. They lived interwoven and in rhythm with the various beings and spirits they felt surrounding them. When the European occupiers, conquerors, and pioneers arrived, they saw the land as a "virginal" wilderness waiting to be husbanded by their vision and industry, a tabula rasa upon which they could inscribe their "manifest destiny." The indigenous people, in their view, wasted the land, and only superficially and very basically tapped into its promise. The removal of the indigenous people was therefore a freeing up of the land with all its hidden wealth and potentiality. Implied of course in the belief system of the European, was that the forced separation of the First Nation peoples from the land they knew and drew sustenance from, was an easily accomplished divorce necessitating a relatively brief period of adaptation and re-education. We now are only beginning to realize how much suffering we caused.



III. Monument Valley

*The spirit of the Native people, the first
people, has never died.
It lives in the rocks and the forests, the
rivers and the mountains.
It murmurs in the brooks and whispers
in the trees. The hearts
of these people were formed of the
earth that we now walk,
and their voice can never be silenced.*

—Kent Nerburn⁸

In the Fall of 1997, my husband and I stayed in a bare bones campground run by a Navajo man that overlooked iconic Monument Valley.

The land was never a tabula rasa, a virgin-wilderness and it never will be. The land is not something “dead,” neither is it “godless.” It is rather alive with the presence of the First Nation ancestors and the creative beings the ancestors were and are living in connection with.

Within this terrible dislocation, perhaps the First Nation peoples developed an even greater awareness of the continued presence of their ancestors. They had been forcibly removed from their lands, but their ancestors were still there. No one could remove them. This meant, in the thinking of some of the First Nation peoples, that for the white man there is no natural solitude—no place within this land where the First Nation ancestors are not present. There is then no true, pre-contact experience of the land of America for white people. The land was never a tabula rasa, a virgin-wilderness and it never will be. The land is not something “dead,” neither is it “godless.” It is rather alive with the presence of the First Nation ancestors and the creative beings the ancestors were and are living in connection with.

It is within this framework that Wolfgang J. Aurose’s (Schmidt-Reinecke) conception of the First Nation peoples forming a spiritual foundation for America is more powerfully understood. It is not primarily the influence of past, indigenous teachings and stories, current cultural re-enactments, or eloquent First Nation leaders past and present which primarily creates America’s spiritual foundation. It is rather the presence of First Nation ancestors who fill this land with their active and creative presence and with their wisdom. These ancestors are not only working with and for the land and First Nation peoples, but for all who live within America and are part of Her soul. This is the astonishing thing I personally discovered.

One night I was woken by the sound of snoring. I first thought I was in a teepee and was hearing the snoring of an old male relative, a grandfather perhaps. As I drifted closer to the waking state, I wondered if I had been woken by my own snoring. Immediately following this thought there was a laugh. I had the impression of an old indigenous man with bare chest and long, wavy, grey hair, sitting cross-legged on the earth. This man, this ancestral presence, seemed to find my confusion about whether I was awake or dreaming, and who was doing what, hugely funny. His laughing silence was beautiful and utterly absorbing. It was an experience of Earthly-Human bliss, of what I have since called indigenous ananda. Through it and in it I had the taste and feeling of what it

means to be a complete Human-Earth being.

So much was instantaneously communicated through that laugh. There was a remarkable aliveness, presence, and awareness. With later reflection, I knew there were also qualities of warmth, generosity, humor, light-heartedness, wisdom, strength, knowingness, good-naturedness, groundedness, keen perception, intelligence, connectedness, lovingness, and peacefulness. These qualities formed a flowering bouquet I realized was unique to Earth and were Earth’s gift to the Cosmos.

To taste and be wholly touched, even for a moment, by the bliss of living as a complete Earth-Human makes any of our scientific-technological achievements pale and appear superficial by comparison. That I should

first experience this completeness and bliss through a First Nation ancestor and in a state which was neither dreaming or waking, but was somehow both, feels very significant.

A new way of knowing and a new bridge can be found when dreaming/imagining and waking are not kept so separate, and when waking does not dominate so utterly. Dreaming eases or lessens the stark contrast between things, between people, between Earth and Human, between Human and animal, and between activities. The laugh of the ancestral spirit was an expression of softening, of tender generosity and of wide-open hospitality. It was an infinite “give” experienced at the very heart of life, an understanding that the mind can never truly separate out what is going on or who is doing



what, and it's OK. All the virtues of our waking life, by themselves, will not make us complete Earth-Human beings. We need what comes to us in dreaming and in being dreamt. We need how the ancestors can come to us in dreaming. Waking mind, alone, often becomes tyrannical, an insensitive colonizer. It needs the gentling and enlivening influence of dreaming. The future Earth-Human does not keep waking and dreaming isolated from each other, rather he/she allows them to cross-over into each other, to cross-pollinate. Waking and dreaming are the two eyes that can work together towards a wider and deeper vision.

IV. Mesa Verde

The white man does not understand the Indian for the reason he does not understand America. He is too far removed... The roots of his life have not yet grasped the rock and soil... But in the Indian the spirit of the land is still vested; it will be until other men are able to divine and meet its rhythm.

—Standing Bear, Ogala⁹

In 2008 I met Robert Sardello at a one day workshop he was giving on body awareness at the Institute of Imaginal Studies in San Rafael. When I asked him during a break who his major influences were, he included Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Robert teaches the importance of putting our awareness in the body where we can begin to connect again with Earth. He relates to and experiences Earth as a spiritual, conscious being and has an appreciation of the First Nation people. During several retreats which he facilitated, we would visit special First Nation sites and do practices which began with putting our awareness in the body. One of these special places was Mesa Verde.

At Mesa Verde our retreat group of about 20 people went to the far corner of the cliff dwellings and began a series of practices we had been instructed in beforehand. They involved putting our awareness within the body, taking in “the gesture of the land,” and others. During these practices, I felt the Earth undulating under my feet and moving through me. I had the strong impression of the First Nation people dancing in rhythm with Earth's movement and listening and speaking to Her through their bodies, particularly their feet. My imaginal perception was validated many years later when I went with a friend to the Maidu Museum and Historic Site in Roseville, California. There, I listened to a narrative about First Nation ceremonial dancing, about how through their feet the First Nation people communicate with Earth.

I have often experienced this same undulating movement standing quietly underneath trees. I felt it standing by one of the large 9/11 memorial pools in New York City, and I also felt it as I stood in my home and read this line in an e-mail from one of my friends: “Earth can take care of Herself.”

The Mother said some amazing things to Satprem about her own experience of undulating movement.

62.155 ...I am aware of a rather particular state...something I could describe as: what gives me the illusion of a body! I entrust it to the person I walk with (in other words, it's not my responsibility: that person has to make sure that it doesn't fall, doesn't bump into things you understand), and the consciousness is a sort of limitless consciousness, like waves, but not individual waves: it is a MOVEMENT of waves, a movement of material waves, corporeal, I might

say, as vast as the earth, but not... not round or flat or....something quite infinite in its sensation, but an undulatory movement. And this undulatory movement is the movement of life.¹⁰

Mother's experience of undulatory movement seems vaster, more full-bodied, and more limitless than mine which was more particular and limited. However, it is exciting to think that my experience, and probably the experience of the First Nation peoples, could lie on a continuum. Mother is a discoverer of the undulating movement on a larger, more limitless scale. Mother reported that the waves of the undulating movement were “material,” and “corporeal.” That has been my experience also. I get motion sickness fairly easily, and whenever I have experienced the undulating movement whether it be underneath trees, at Mesa Verde, or in other circumstances, I always feel slightly nauseous.

Mother adds a wonderful, more detailed description of this undulating movement:

And so the consciousness (of the body, I suppose)...there is a consciousness floating along in that with a sensation of eternal peace, but it is not an “expanse,” the word is wrong: it's a limitless movement, with a very harmonious and very tranquil rhythm, very vast, and very calm. And this movement is life. I walk around my room, and that is what walks. It's very silent, like a movement of waves without beginning or end, with a condensation like this (vertical gesture) and a condensation like that (horizontal gesture), and then a movement of expansion (gesture like a pulsating ocean). That is, a



sort of gathering up, and concentration, then an expansion and diffusion.¹¹

Mother said more than once that this undulatory movement is life. We know Earth is a living planetary body. We do not know yet if there is life elsewhere, but we do know it is here. That undulatory movement may then be unique to Earth and Her gift to the cosmos. Mother's gestures remind one of the rhythm and process of breathing and with the beating of the heart. It is as if breathing, and the beating of the heart were the individualized, physical symbols of this vast undulating movement. It is important to note that undulatory movement is described by Mother as being composed of different, even opposing movements i.e. concentration and diffusion, which paradoxically form a seamless whole.

Later, Mother gives a description of what it feels like to be within this undulatory movement:

62.315 *Now I make a constant distinction between...(how should I put it?) life in a straight line and at right angles, and undulatory life. There is a life where everything is sharp-edged, hard, angular, and you bump into things everywhere, and there is an undulatory life, very sweet, very charming – very charming – but not, not too solid. Strange, it's quite a different kind of life. Even goodwill is aggressive, even affection, tenderness, attachment – all that is as aggressive as can be. It's like being beaten with a stick. But 'that' is a kind of cadence, an undulatory movement which is so ample and so powerful, tremendous really. And it doesn't disturb anything. It doesn't displace any-*

*thing, doesn't clash with anything. And it carries the universe in its undulatory movement, so supple!*¹²

I found Mother's description here about the powerful but completely non-agitating character of the undulating movement to be a wonderfully accurate and precise description. Though Mother did not state that the undulating movement was a movement unique to Earth, Earth, too, experiences this movement. This undulatory movement is creative, powerful and ample, but never causes any disturbance or displacement of anything. It is completely harmless, peaceable and innocent. It is the capacity for everything to fully communicate wordlessly with everything else—for Earth and human beings to communicate with each other. (We speak of being on the same "wave length" with someone else.) Again, all this is experienced at a bodily level. With time, I began to think that the undulating movement, was a bodily manifestation of a rhythm within a multi-modal consciousness.

I found it significant that my first introduction to this undulating movement was at an important First Nation site and seemed to be given through First Nation ancestors. I believe helping us notice and come into rhythm with this undulating movement is yet another way the ancestors are working for America's transformation and the future Earth-Human. Mother's yoga of the cells is a work attuned with the endeavor of the First Nation ancestors to heal America's soul. This is why it is so fitting that Soleil Aurose (Lithman) and Wolfgang J. Aurose (Schmidt-Reinecke) of our Integral Yoga community see the yoga of the cells as being at the core of their Soul of the Nation workshops.

V. Chumash Burial Site

In November, 2014 Robert Sardello led a group of retreat participants, including myself, to a Chumash Burial Site near Santa Barbara. The site was very near the beach and flanked by multi-million dollar homes. There was a roughly made stone monument to mark the maybe 2–3 acre site; otherwise it was barren ground, with broken shells and bits of stone strewn about.

I settled into silence facing the neighboring mountains to the east and with my back towards the sea. Rather playfully, I began imagining myself buried, lying with my feet towards the mountains with my head towards the sea. I imagined my feet becoming the mountains. But then quite suddenly, it was a twilight darkness and I was truly buried. I felt living, dynamic, interweaving lines or threads move from my chest and through my head and join the interweaving lines of energy of the outgoing ocean tide. This flowing, interweaving and joining movement was ecstatic. Then there was a wondering about what was going on between the chest and feet. Peering across the body there was a slight upwardly curved surface like a large, shallow bowl above which floated a beautiful night sky. Then there was an awareness of people standing nearby and a recognition that it was these people who had buried me. The interweaving lines of power passed through the body and joined with the interweaving lines moving through the people. It wasn't as ecstatic as the joining with the sea; however, there was a tremendous sense of security, solidity and belongingness. No matter what happened, or how much time went by, I would always be connected to those who buried me. And then suddenly I realized I was standing up, it was day



time, and the light was extraordinarily bright and beautiful.

It has been so difficult to find a way to convey something of this experience, first to myself and then to others. There were such radical differences in perception, feeling, and “self” experience that I knew without any doubt that there had been a sudden shift to another kind of consciousness. This consciousness had no center or circumference. It was a consciousness where felt connectivity took the place of thought and sense perception.

Shortly after this experience, I saw new meaning in the symbolism of the cross. The horizontal bar represented a consciousness perceiving and serving connectivity, while the vertical bar represented a mental, more separated individualized consciousness of various levels. There was a place where they overlapped or crossed over. Later, the infinity symbol (the sideways “8”) seemed to communicate a kind of evolutionary understanding about this cross over point as will be explained later. The Human of the future needs to learn to navigate a dynamic, multi-modal consciousness. This multi-modal or integral consciousness includes the mode of Individuality and the mode of Connectivity as well as the cross-over mode that could be called Emptiness, No-thingness, or Formlessness. This too is a mode of consciousness. Another way of viewing this is seeing the Individual Consciousness as Waking, the Connective as Dreaming, and the cross-over mode of No-thingness as Deep Sleep. It is important, though, not to narrow down the possibilities by an over-concern with definitions and

precise descriptions.

All of these modes of consciousness have been known or experienced by human beings, but one has usually dominated, been nearly completely identified with, and valued much more highly than the others. Time, necessity, and biology have also been experienced as separating these modes especially if one describes them as waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. In America today, it is largely the Waking/Individual Consciousness that we identify with. Dreaming/Connective Consciousness and Deep Sleep/Formlessness appear very briefly on our radar, often in ways we don’t recognize,

What is very significant is that with increased and more dominant mentalization, true individuality is being lost. Mentalization, which at first offered the human individuality a new degree of freedom, mobility, and sense of itself, is now crushing it the more it excludes the psychic. Truer, deeper, wider expressions of individuality require a multi-modal consciousness.

often in the form of vague longing or dissatisfaction. In these times, as we are moving to a new mode or modes of consciousness, resistance, confusion and suffering are natural. Not knowing the cause of our pain, our profound dissatisfaction, and locked into our current mode of consciousness, we experience the suffering only personally, and feel compelled to search for personal solutions. These solutions are likely to mimic or seemingly hold out the promise of compensating for the unconsciously resisted modes.

In our times, we tend to limit ourselves to a mentalized/individualized consciousness. While this is becoming less true for a growing number of Americans, societally we appear to be drifting into a condition of increased mentalization. We can see this drift

even in the human service professions such as health, mental health, and education. The word “soulless” can be used to describe the experience of our current societal drift. What is very significant is that with increased and more dominant mentalization, true individuality is being lost. Mentalization, which at first offered the human individuality a new degree of freedom, mobility, and sense of itself, is now crushing it the more it excludes the psychic. Truer, deeper, wider expressions of individuality require a multi-modal consciousness.

The ancestral presences I experienced showed me a new path. This path had to do with joining the “dance” of consciousness, of entering its new, varying and very creative rhythm. This rhythm is not controlled by any particular mode of consciousness. It arises spontaneously from the Whole, from whatever makes the different modes of consciousness, one. Because of this, from any one mode of consciousness it appears as a mystery. It is the rhythm, the movement between these modes of consciousness—the way they separate and come together, the way they dynamically penetrate and receive each other—where the future transformation lies. The future body must also become more supple, more capable of manifesting and expressing this dynamic movement of consciousness.

Some of the First Nation peoples had a kind of initiatory and prophetic knowledge of multiple modes of consciousness and knew of a passage way that linked them. We can see signs of this knowing in the ancient ceremonial



buildings the Pueblo people started building as early as 800 or 900 A.D. These structures were called, “kivas.”

The kiva is a symbolic, architectural representation of both the reality of different worlds (created by different modes of consciousness) and the possibility of moving between them. Kivas are found in the Southwestern part of the United States. The great kivas were usually large, circular, subterranean or semi-subterranean structures. In the floor of this structure was a small hole called a “sipapu” that symbolized the opening in the ceiling of an even more interior, deeper world from which the ancestors had emerged. Also in the kiva would be a central fire pit and often benches and foot drums. A ladder would be set against a hole in the roof of the kiva large enough for one individual at a time to climb up into the other, sunlit world. Within the kiva important business would be discussed, but it was also a ceremonial place where there was chanting and story telling. Stories were told about where the people had come from. The kiva was seen as a special opening into the reality of their common Mother.

When I first saw and experienced a great kiva, I knew it was a very special place and was an expression of a very profound kind of knowing. I imagined climbing up the ladder from the subterranean part of the kiva and emerging into the full light of day. I would do this after being with my people for perhaps several hours in the semi-dark of the kiva listening to stories, chanting, and perhaps drumming. The sun-lit world, the world I would have passed into, would have struck me with its luminous beauty even as I felt the loss of safety and of a more intimate connection, resonance and union with Earth and with the people. I also imagined myself, while sitting in the kiva, being drawn to the sipapu, wondering what

it was like in that more interior, more unknown place and how my ancestors had found the passageway to the other worlds. So perhaps it is not so strange that my “meetings” with First Nation ancestors in the West and Southwest have been experienced as an initiation into a new kind of consciousness.

VI.

Grief and Hope in America

*“Weep! Weep!” calls a toad from the water’s edge. And I do. If grief can be a doorway to love, then let us all weep for the world we are breaking apart so we can love it back to wholeness again.*¹³

—Robin Wall Kimmerer

What I have shared in this article, in all the articles, gives me hope for America’s future. I don’t believe we are going to do more than glimpse that future however, without suffering and grief and without tasting death. We are not going to enter it without facing and experiencing the suffering we have brought and are still bringing upon others, upon entire communities human and non-human, and upon ourselves. We likely need to experience the cost of imprisoning ourselves in one modality of consciousness before we assent to freedom.

The symbols that came spontaneously to mind regarding multi-modal consciousness after my experience at the Chumash burial site were the cross and the infinity symbol. The cross is an obvious symbol of suffering, love, and redemptive healing. As I entered the meaning of the infinity symbol, I saw it similarly, but with the simultaneous dimension of “resurrection.” One consciousness “dies,” becomes nothing (symbolized by the central point) so that another may “live.” This is how love is built into human consciousness, itself. The rhythm of conscious-

ness, which the First Nation ancestral presences showed me the possibility of, is love’s manifestation.

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Essays

Two complementary perspectives on death and the afterlife

by Larry Seidlitz

Introduction

One of the most perplexing and persistent questions that has confronted humanity throughout its history is “What happens to us after we die.” Religions, philosophies, and science have given us different answers. Christianity and Islam say we continue to live eternally in heaven or hell. Hinduism and Buddhism say we continue to reincarnate in a new life on earth until we are enlightened and merge in the eternal Reality of Existence (Hinduism) or Nonexistence (Buddhism). Science tells us that the material universe is the only reality, so when the body dies, we cease to exist as an individual. Within each of these broad perspectives, there are many variations and dissenting views. Some scientists have presented evidence for the continuation of conscious individual existence after death, for example, from the accounts of people who briefly “died” and came back to life, and while some find this evidence convincing, many scientists do not. Within Hinduism and Buddhism there are many different variations in the specifics of what happens after death as well as the nature of the ultimate Reality into which we eventually merge. Various spiritual teachers, saints and sages within these and numerous other spiritual traditions have given their own unique views. Ultimately, each person chooses their



own beliefs about death and the afterlife, even if that choice is “undecided,” based on their exposure to various views and life experiences.

This article examines and compares two complementary perspectives on the nature and process of death, the sojourn of the soul after death, and its return to life in a succeeding birth. Both perspectives are considered in the light of their respective broader spiritual philosophies regarding the nature of existence and the purpose of life. The first perspective examined is Neale Donald Walsch’s view as expressed in his book *Home with God in a life that never ends*. Walsch is an American spiritual teacher, writer, lecturer, and “creator of the School of the New Spirituality and founder of The Group of 1000, a non-profit organization supporting global spiritual awakening” (back cover of the book). The second perspective is that of Sri Aurobindo’s, as expressed primarily in his *Letters on Yoga*, but also in other works such as *The Life Divine*, the series of essays “Karma and Rebirth” in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, and his epic poem *Savitri*. Following a summary of these two remarkable views of the process of death and rebirth, I consider some of the important points of convergence and divergence, and their differences in emphasis of complementary aspects.

Walsch’s book is the last in a series of nine books of “Conversations with God,” among numerous other spiritually oriented books, and focuses primarily on the nature and process of death and its aftermath, in the context of his larger cosmology. Like the other books in the series, it is presented as a conversation between the author and God. To what extent God’s words in the text are God’s, are God’s as intuited and filtered through the author’s mind, are the author’s own views presented for stylistic purposes as God’s, or are simply delusions or fantasies is left for the reader to decide. For the purposes of this article I will refer to them as Walsch’s words and views. It should be added that the author claims no exclusive or privileged access to truth, highlights his own human shortcomings, and even asserts, in “God’s” words, “Do not believe a single thing I say. Listen to what I say, then believe what your heart tells you is true” (*Home with God*, p. 25). The same advice could be applied to the various views expressed in this article.

Although most of the assertions in Walsch’s book regarding death and the hereafter are presented without supporting evidence (other than “coming from God”), some of them are supported by lived experiences as reported by the author and/or by others known to the author, which are sometimes quoted in letters. There are also some references made to conclusions from science that support various aspects of the underlying cosmology that is presented. Beyond this, many of the assertions that are made “feel” right, at least to this reader, and are typically presented in powerful and evocative words. Indeed, the author highlights 18 primary and pithy assertions, calling them “remembrances,” suggesting that they are truths that we all know deep within us and of which we are



simply being “reminded.” Moreover, the overall picture that is presented is extremely complex and often surprising, and yet its many different pieces fit together beautifully as in an intricate puzzle. In my view the book is very interesting and powerful, and while I may not agree with everything that is said, it resonates well with Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s views, gives elaborate descriptions of the passage through death and the afterlife in vivid and evocative language, and presents a comforting and inspiring perspective on the nature of life and death.

Many readers of this article will be familiar with at least the outlines of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual philosophy and his general views about death, the afterlife, and rebirth, which stem from his deep study of the Indian spiritual tradition, but also from his profound spiritual experience and realization. Still, for those who are not familiar, and those who would like a reminder, I will briefly summarize these here as a general framework within which to hold the more detailed accounts to come afterwards. For Sri Aurobindo, what we may for convenience call God (Sri Aurobindo sometimes uses the term God as a substitute for the Sanskrit term Brahman) is an omnipresent Reality, “omnipresent above the cosmic manifestation and in it and immanent in each individual” (*The Life Divine*, p. 380). In a more elaborate description, Sri Aurobindo says that

Brahman is the Consciousness that knows itself in all that exists; Brahman is the Force that sustains the power of God and Titan and Demon, the Force that acts in man and animal and the forms and energies of Nature; Brahman is the Ananda, the secret Bliss of existence which is the ether of our being and without which

none could breathe or live. Brahman is the inner Soul in all; it has taken a form in correspondence with each created form which it inhabits. The Lord of Beings is that which is conscious in the conscious being, but he is also the Conscious in inconscient things, the One who is master and in control of the many that are passive in the hands of Force-Nature. He is the Timeless and Time; He is Space and all that is in Space; He is Causality and the cause and the effect: He is the thinker and his thought, the warrior and his courage, the gambler and his dice-throw. All realities and all aspects and all semblances are the Brahman; Brahman is the Absolute, the Transcendent and incommunicable, the Supracosmic Existence that sustains the cosmos, the Cosmic Self that upholds all beings, but It is too the self of each individual: the soul or psychic entity... (*The Life Divine*, pp. 338-339)

This means that cosmos and individual are manifestations of a transcendent Self who is indivisible being although he seems to be divided or distributed; but he is not really divided or distributed but indivisibly present everywhere. Therefore all is in each and each is in all and all is in God and God in all; and when the liberated soul comes into union with this Transcendent, it has this self-experience of itself and cosmos which is translated psychologically into a mutual inclusion and a persistent existence of both in a divine union which is at once a oneness and a fusion and an embrace. (*The Life Divine*, p. 387)

So from this perspective, God is eternal and everywhere, perpetually surrounding us and permeating our very being. And yet this truth of our existence is not our *experience* of our existence. We feel ourselves as separate individuals existing in an often hostile environment struggling with other separate beings like ourselves for survival and growth and expansion, in what we perceive as a precarious and limited life-span with death and disintegration as its inevitable and foreseeable end. How can we reconcile these apparently contradictory perspectives of our existence? Sri Aurobindo says,

There is also a dynamic power of this Omnipresence, a creative or self-manifesting action of its infinite Consciousness-Force. There is as a phase or movement of the self-manifestation a descent into an apparent material inconscience, an awakening of the individual out of the Inconscience and an evolution of his being into the spiritual and supramental consciousness and power of the Reality, into his own universal and transcendent Self and source of existence. (*The Life Divine*, p. 380)

In other words, God has created out of and within his own infinite Being this material world of earth, sea, and sky we see around us. In this material world, individual beings, from grasshoppers to philosophers, are gradually evolving, gradually awakening in consciousness, until at long last they may again become consciously unified with the eternal, infinite, all-conscious, all-blissful Existence which is their ultimate source and destiny.

According to this view, the evolution of consciousness within individual beings occurs over eons, through



many successive earthly lives. In the intermediate stages of this evolution, which is carried forward by nature, the individual being is ignorant, limited, and subject to pain and death. However, each evolving individual being is sustained by an eternal and spiritual essence which is its innermost Reality, called the soul. Around this soul, a conscious soul personality gradually develops in the course of evolution, retaining the gains made in the growth of consciousness from one life, through death, to the next life. The ultimate destiny of the psychic being—and its purpose—is reunification with God in a spiritual consciousness, while yet retaining its unique individuality, and divinizing the individual's life on earth.

This view of the nature of existence, God, the soul, the evolution of the individual towards unification with God, death and rebirth is generally consistent with Walsch's view, which I will now turn to discuss in greater detail. I begin by describing some of his basic assertions regarding the nature of death.

Walsch's view of death and the afterlife

Three of Walsch's 14 remembrances, which I will call assertions of his view of death, are closely related and concern the self-determined nature of death:

1. Dying is something you do for you.
2. You are the cause of your own death. This always true, no matter where, or how, you die.
3. You cannot die against your will (p. 325).

These three related assertions are at once provocative, interesting, and reassuring. Behind the assertions is

the idea that the soul only chooses to leave the body when it has completed what it wants to achieve or experience in the present lifetime.

Walsch deals carefully with the apparently practical and moral objections to these assertions, leaving us with a deep sense of the meaningfulness of death as well as reassurance about the continuation of our conscious existence after death. The assertions seem to be contradicted by occurrences of death by sudden accident or murder, or the common observation that many people approaching death often go to great lengths to prolong their life as much as possible. In dealing with such objections, Walsch distinguishes between the superconscious, conscious, and subconscious levels of our consciousness: "A soul can know at the superconscious level that it is Complete for this lifetime, but not be "aware" of that at the subconscious or conscious level" (p. 50). The conscious level is the level of awareness in which we normally operate, choose, and experience life, and the subconscious level is the level in which we do things automatically, such as beating our heart or perceiving incoming information, storing it in memory, and retrieving and using such information to automatically respond to a myriad of situations (consider a child learning to speak, for example). "The superconscious is the part of you that holds the larger agenda of the soul—which is to move to Completion in what you came to the body to experience and to feel" (p. 52). Walsch adds that "[t]he superconscious is constantly leading you to your next most desired growth experience, drawing to you the exact, right, and perfect people, places, and events with which to have that..." (p. 52) This implies that it is the soul that chooses the circumstances of life and death leading it towards growth and fulfilment, but

that we may or may not be consciously aware of this, and we may even consciously or subconsciously resist this process and the soul's choices. It also implies that the soul may put us into situations, an accident or murder, or a diseased body, for example, for its own purposes of leading the individual to its next growth experience, which for a soul that has completed its intended experiences for the current life, may be death and subsequent rebirth in a new body and new life situation.

The self-determined nature of death by the soul leads to three other of Walsch's postulates which emphasize the positive nature of death:

5. Death is never a tragedy. It is always a gift.
11. The timing and the circumstances of death are always perfect.
12. The death of every person always serves the agenda of every other person who is aware of it. That is why they are aware of it. Therefore, no death (and no life) is ever "wasted." No one ever dies in vain (pp. 325-326).

The distinction between the superconscious and the conscious parts of the being, their different perspectives on existence, is central to Walsch's view of death and life. "Perspective creates perception" (p. 41). Moreover, "perception creates experience" (p. 74). So death, like everything else in life, may be experienced as a tragedy or a gift, depending on how one looks at it. From the limited human perspective, death often appears to be a tragedy. But from God's viewpoint, in its truth, it is always a gift. It is not an end of life, but from this perspective, a passage to an afterlife which will include, as we will see, a merging into God, and afterwards, a new life with the opportunity for new growth and experience



and an enlarged existence. But it is also a gift and perfectly in its place because, like all things in this world, it is divinely ordained, part of God's plan. This world has been created by God within himself out of himself. "God is you, writ large. Indeed, God is everything. There is nothing that is not God" (p. 71). We are always "home with God in a life that never ends," the title of the book, only we normally don't perceive or experience life that way. And yet, for Walsch, that perception and that experience is precisely the aim of life, and death. Regarding our own death, "knowing that you and God are One, and that you are making this decision jointly, can take you to a place of soft serenity" (p. 77). But another emphasis of the book is that we don't need to die to experience our oneness with

God, we can experience God in life as well as death because God is the truth of our existence. We are asked to seek God in ourselves, in everyone, and in everything. How we look at life determines our experience of life.

As "God is everything," so everything is intricately interwoven. Each death touches the life of everyone who is aware of it, and its effects ripple through all of existence. This point can help us come to terms with what people often experience as tragic deaths—deaths due to war, terrorism, or disasters, for example, or the deaths of children or people in the prime of their life. Of course, while people may experience those deaths as tragic, and properly grieve their loss, such deaths often have the effect of instigating needed change and advance, or making people look more deeply into the

meaning of life, or appreciate and utilize their own life more fully, or turn to God for solace or insight. Such cases often seem to bring out positive qualities and actions in others.

Walsch also raises the question whether the soul's choice to die implies that such a death is suicide. Here he makes some useful distinctions. First, he says, for a death to be suicide the person must make a conscious choice to die, it cannot simply be the superconscious choice of the soul. Secondly, the conscious choice to take one's life must be in order to escape from life, from its pain or challenges, not because one's life mission

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has been completed. He emphasizes that "death is designed for going TO something, not for escaping FROM something" (p. 61). He explains that in reality death is not an escape; people who commit suicide do not escape from the painful experiences they have encountered in life, because their soul had come into the body to have those experiences, and thus they will have to be confronted again in the next life until they have fulfilled their intended purpose, which is to prod the soul to grow by overcoming them. Moreover, typically the person contemplating suicide imagines that through their death they will enter into a void that is free of pain, but Walsch argues that in reality there is no void to step into: "[W]hat you die with, you will continue to live with." (p. 63). He says that such souls, after a period of transition,

will find peace and a period of rejuvenation in death, but afterwards will have to come back in another life to face the difficulties that they tried to avoid in the previous one.

Walsch also brings in the issue of euthanasia. He says, "Euthanasia cannot be equated with suicide. People who are contemplating suicide in the middle of an otherwise active and reasonably healthy life are making a very particular kind of decision. People who end a life that is a very short time away from ending anyway, with every medical evidence indicating that, are making an entirely different kind of decision" (p. 69). He adds that in the latter cases

the person may ask whether it is necessary to suffer the final pain and indignity of their life, and each such soul will have the answer that is right for it.

What, according to Walsch, happens at the time of death? He explains that the experience of death occurs in three stages. In the first stage, at the moment of death, the person recognizes that although they have died, their life goes on. They realize, often for the first time, that they are not their body. In the second stage, the experience differs for different individuals, depending on their beliefs about death, and corresponds to whatever the person believes happens after death. Thus, one person may experience going to heaven, in the manner in which they have imagined it, another may experience going to hell, if they believed that is where they would go, another may experience being enfolded in the arms of an unconditionally loving God, if that is what they believed would happen, whereas another might



enter into a sleep of unconsciousness, if they believed that they would cease to exist. Others who were uncertain about life after death would likely experience some confusion and uncertainty about what is happening, and about how to proceed. Similarly, other beliefs about what happens after death may be experienced by the person. In particular, Walsch mentions that if we believe it will happen, we will be greeted by all of our loved ones—those who have died before us and those who will die after us (p. 299). These experiences, however, are temporary. Moreover, in the case of experiencing hell, the person would not actually suffer, “they will simply observe themselves from a detached distance and see what is going on—something like watching an instructional video” (p. 100). He explains that after the soul experiences that it has left the body, it creates these mental images and experiences from its now wider perspective. Being free from the constraints of the body and the material world, the power of the mind to create its lived experience is greatly enhanced, and at the same time, it views them as if from a distance. Eventually, the soul turns from these mind-created experiences and moves into the third stage of death. He notes that the first stage of death releases the soul from identification with the body, and the second stage of death releases the soul from identification with the mind.

In the third stage, the soul “will merge with the Essence and begin to experience the Ultimate Reality at the Core of Your Being” (p. 108). A condensed version of Walsch’s description of merging with this Ultimate Reality is as follows:

Just prior to the mergence, the soul hovers before the Light. It basks in the glow of the Essence.

All feelings of fear or apprehension or uneasiness of any kind dropped away during the race through the passage. Now the essence is radiating pure love, and the soul before it experiences what can only be described as an enveloping sense of being ... covered...

A feeble attempt would call it the feeling of being warmly embraced, deeply comforted, dearly cherished, profoundly appreciated, genuinely treasured, softly nurtured, profoundly understood, completely forgiven, wholly absolved, long awaited, happily welcomed, totally honoured, joyously celebrated, absolutely protected, instantly perfected, and unconditionally loved—all at once.

Releasing without the slightest hesitation or regret any and all sense of individual selfhood, the soul moves into the Light. There, it is submerged in something so wondrous that it loses all desire to ever know anything else, melting into the breathtaking glory of unending magnificence, unparalleled beauty, and unequalled completeness of being.

Now you are merged with this Light and you feel dissolved. This “melting” completes the change in your identity. You no longer identify your Self in any way or at any level with the separate aspect of being that you called “you” in your physical life....

What occurs here, when you are embraced by the Light, is that you merge with your soul. You come to know at last that you are not a body and not a mind, and not even solely spirit, but all three. This is what the entire process is about...

In death, all of your individual identities are shed, ending the separation OF you FROM you, at last (pp. 226-228).

Walsch explains that after experiencing this union with God at the core of your being, “you regain your awareness of the limited identity that you held in your last lifetime...but you do not move back into that identity. Rather, you experience your Self as much larger than that, much more unlimited” (p. 250). At this point the soul reviews the life it has lived. “Every moment is important to you, because you realize as you examine the individual moments of your life that those moments are what you used to create your experience of Self—and soon you are going to decide how you wish to re-create your Self anew” (p. 249).

But why would the soul want to leave that experience of mergence in God and experience itself again as an individuality? Walsch explains that it is the nature of life to express itself, but the word life could also be substituted with the word God: “In the process of self-expression, Life quite literally “expresses” Itself. That is, It pushes Itself out FROM Itself, giving birth to Itself as an aspect OF Itself, that it might Know Itself in Its Own Experience” (p. 252).

After the life review, Walsch introduces one of the most mindblowing, or unbelievable, components of his view: the Holy Inquiry. Each soul is asked, by “God Himself”, “Do you want to stay?” (p. 255-256). That is, the soul is given the choice of whether to stay dead and move on in its passage toward the spiritual realm, or to go back to its previous life. “If the soul asks to “go back,” the soul is “sent back” to the physical world instantly...*arriving a nanosecond before it ‘died’*” (pp. 257-258). “When you ‘die’



and then 'go back,' what you do in actuality is simply move your conscious awareness to an alternate reality. In that reality you experience the moment of your 'death' over again, but this time you don't die, you live" (p. 270). The soul's perception from the core of being *creates* the alternate experience of reality. Thus, the soul is given the choice to determine whether it has completed the experience it had wanted for the previous life. If it feels it has not, it may go back for further experience. Walsch contends that often souls choose to go back and do, and that experiences of "close calls" with death frequently are in reality such returns. If the soul decides "to stay," it moves towards the spiritual realm, where it does the joyful work of re-creating its identity anew for its next life.

Walsch provides little description of the spiritual realm on "the other side" of the core of being, indicating that it is basically indescribable in any case. The soul takes with it the knowledge it has gained at the core into the spiritual realm, but is able to view it from a distance. It is essentially a realm of knowing, but also a realm of pure joy. "Yet there will come a moment when Knowing will not be enough. The soul will seek to experience what it Knows of Itself in its new idea about Itself. This, it understands, can occur only in the physical world" (p. 285). Then it returns again to the core of being, where it merges again with God, and afterwards moves again to the physical realm to experience another aspect of its being: "the next grandest version of the greatest vision ever you held about Who You Are" (p. 151).

Sri Aurobindo's view of death and the afterlife

Sri Aurobindo's view, while largely conforming to the overall picture

presented by Walsch, is more complex and brings in additional elements and emphasizes certain ideas and distinctions that are not highlighted by Walsch. One important aspect of Sri Aurobindo's view, which also differentiates it from most traditional Hindu teachings, is his more refined conception of the soul, sometimes called the psychic, and the soul personality, called the psychic being:

What is meant in the terminology of the Yoga by the psychic is the soul element in the nature, the pure psyche or divine nucleus which stands behind mind, life and body (it is not the ego) but of which we are only dimly aware. It is a portion of the Divine and permanent from life to life, taking the experience of life through its outer instruments. As this experience grows it manifests a developing psychic personality which insisting always on the good, true and beautiful, finally becomes ready and strong enough to turn the nature towards the Divine. It can then come entirely forward, breaking through the mental, vital and physical screen, govern the instincts and transform the nature. (*Letters on Yoga III*, p. 337)

This soul personality evolves through successive lives. For most people, the psychic being is hidden deep within, and only indirectly influences the surface consciousness made up of thoughts, emotions, impulses, and physical activities, orienting them towards the growth of knowledge, love, and beauty. As it develops in the course of its evolution through the experiences of its instruments of mind, life and body, it establishes an increasing influence and control over the

outer nature until at last it can come out into the surface consciousness and directly lead the individual to its higher spiritual possibilities.

Another important aspect of Sri Aurobindo's teaching closely related to the psychic and psychic being is the Jivatman, or central being:

When the one Divine manifests its ever inherent multiplicity, this essential Self or Atman becomes for that manifestation the Jivatman, the central being who presides from above over the evolution of its personalities and terrestrial lives here, but is itself an eternal portion of the Divine and prior to the terrestrial manifestation—*parā prakṛtir jīvabhūtā*.

In this lower manifestation, *aparā prakṛti*, this eternal portion of the Divine appears as the soul, a spark of the Divine Fire, supporting the individual evolution, supporting the mental, vital and physical being. The psychic being is the spark growing into a Fire, evolving with the growth of the consciousness. The psychic being is therefore evolutionary, not like the Jivatman, prior to the evolution. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 56-57)

Thus, the Jivatman is an eternal individual portion of the Divine that presides over the evolution and development of each line of successive earthly lives. Some spark of it, called the psychic, also descends into the manifestation to support the evolution from within. As this psychic element grows within the manifestation, it becomes the psychic being. The Jivatman, therefore, brings and holds together the various mental, vital, and physical personalities and tendencies and leads them through a succession of life experiences towards their higher



possibilities and their integration with the psychic being, which is its representative within the manifestation.

Another central aspect of Sri Aurobindo's perspective is the idea that rebirth serves the evolution of consciousness on earth. This evolution started from inconscient matter and has evolved through simple and complex life forms to mental humanity, and is continuing towards a divine life on earth in which individual beings will regain their conscious unity with God but continue to live as individuals interacting with each other and with humanity, animals, and nature. Rebirth is the mechanism by which consciousness, individualized for a more concentrated evolution, can retain its gains in development made during the course of a lifetime through death to a succeeding life. A single body, as it is now constituted of a substance relatively less conscious and plastic, cannot persist long enough to house this gradual evolution of consciousness for more than a relatively brief stage. Moreover, successive lives in different circumstances enable the variety of experiences necessary for a rounded and complete development of the evolving consciousness.

A further idea in Sri Aurobindo's view that guides the particular trajectory of the evolving soul is the idea of karma, or action and its consequences:

Fundamentally, the meaning of Karma is that all existence is the working of a universal Energy, a process and an action and a building of things by that action,—an unbuilding too, but as a step to farther building,—that all is a continuous chain in which every one link is bound indissolubly to the past infinity of numberless links, and the whole governed by fixed relations, by

a fixed association of cause and effect, present action the result of past action as future action will be the result of present action, all cause a working of energy and all effect too a working of energy. The moral significance is that all our existence is a putting out of an energy which is in us and by which we are made and as is the nature of the energy which is put forth as cause, so shall be that of the energy which returns as effect, that this is the universal law and nothing in the world can, being of and in our world, escape from its governing incidence... (*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, pp. 331-332)

The karmic influences of the past and their consequences impose restrictions on the development of the outer nature and personality—on the mind, life and body—not directly on the psychic being, but when the psychic being takes a new birth, it takes on and accepts the limitations of an outer nature and personality in order to further evolve its own possibilities as well theirs, and thus may take on their karmic consequences. But here too the matter is not straightforward and simple:

The soul gathers the essential element of its experiences in life and makes that its basis of growth in the evolution; when it returns to birth it takes up with its mental, vital, physical sheaths so much of its Karma as is useful to it in the new life for farther experience. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 534-535)

It is a little difficult to explain. When one gets a new body, the nature which inhabits it, nature of mind, nature of vital, nature of physical, is made up of many

personalities, not one simple personality as is supposed—although there is one central being. This complex personality is formed partly by bringing together personalities of past lives, but also by gathering experiences, tendencies, influences from the earth atmosphere—which are taken up by one of the constituent personalities as suitable to his own nature. (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 542)

Another thing. It is not the personality, the character that is of the first importance in rebirth—it is the psychic being who stands behind the evolution of the nature and evolves with it. The psychic when it departs from the body, shedding even the mental and vital on its way to its resting place, carries with it the heart of its experiences,—not the physical events, not the vital movements, not the mental buildings, not the capacities or characters, but something essential that it gathered from them, that might be called the divine element for the sake of which the rest existed. That is the permanent addition, it is that that helps in the growth towards the Divine... What was the divine element in the magnanimity of the warrior, that which expressed itself in his loyalty, nobility, high courage, what was the divine element behind the harmonious mentality and generous vitality of the poet and expressed itself in them, that remains and in a new harmony of character may find a new expression or, if the life is turned towards the Divine, be taken up as powers for the realisation or for the work that has to be done for the Divine. (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 544)



Thus, the Jivatman above, represented by the psychic being that incarnates in each new birth, may select certain personalities or personality characteristics that it has developed in previous lives, and combine those with other mental, vital, and physical tendencies that are part of the universal nature, to create a new outer nature that will serve its purposes of gaining the kinds of experiences the psychic being needs for its next stage of evolutionary growth. These past personalities selected by the psychic being to be part of the new personality have developed under the laws of karma and carry future karmic consequences.

The psychic being has itself developed from its previous experiences in physical life and it carries the essence of those experiences within itself,

putting some of its developed qualities forward in the new life, holding others back, depending on its purposes for the new incarnation. The extent to which it has grown and developed positive qualities in the course of its previous life development determines its strength and the stock of positive qualities it has available to put forward in the next life to meet the new challenges that it has set for itself.

Another aspect of Sri Aurobindo's view is that there are planes of existence between the physical plane in which we dwell, and the psychic plane of existence to which the soul moves after death. There is also a vital plane and a mental plane and within each of these two there are various worlds or domains. The vital plane has as its dominant principle the life energies: vital forces of ambition, drive, power; emotions such fear, anger, hatred, joy,

love, and pleasure; and instincts such as hunger, greed and sexual desire. The vital worlds and their inhabitant beings have a subtle physical substance, as in our dreams; our dreams in fact may represent our own sojourns into these subtle worlds.

Sri Aurobindo explains that heaven and hell are domains within the vital plane that the soul may pass through in its journey to the psychic world:

Hell and heaven are often imaginary states of the soul, or rather of the vital being, which it constructs about it after its

imaginations, and also has different domains associated with different types of ideas and imaginations. These worlds are much freer in the direct expression of thoughts or imaginations than the physical world, that is, thoughts and imaginations are immediately given shape and substance and played out in action before the mind's eye. The soul at the time of death typically passes through the vital and mental worlds before entering the psychic world where it rests and assimilates its experiences of the previous life and prepares for its next incarnation. In its passage through these worlds, it drops its vital and mental personali-

ties and tendencies and they separate and remain there or dissolve, but as explained by Sri Aurobindo below, there are many variations

The psychic being has itself developed from its previous experiences in physical life and it carries the essence of those experiences within itself, putting some of its developed qualities forward in the new life, holding others back, depending on its purposes for the new incarnation.

passing. What is meant by hell is a painful passage through some vital world or a dolorous lingering there as for instance in many cases of suicide where one remains surrounded by the forces of suffering and turmoil created by this unnatural and violent exit. There are also, of course, real worlds of mind and vital worlds which are penetrated with joyful or dark experiences, and one may pass through these as the result of things formed in the nature which create the necessary affinities. But the idea of reward or retribution is a crude and vulgar conception and we can disregard it as a mere popular error. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 535-536)

The mental plane has as its dominant principle mental ideas and im-

that are possible:

When the body is dissolved, the vital goes into the vital plane and remains there for a time, but after a time the vital sheath disappears. The last to dissolve is the mental sheath. Finally the soul or psychic being retires into the psychic world to rest there till a new birth is due. This is the general course for ordinarily developed human beings. There are variations according to the nature of the individual and his development. For example, if the mental is strongly developed, then the mental being can remain; so also can the vital, provided they are organised by and centred around the true psychic being; they share the immortality of the psychic. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 534-535)



The psychic does not give up the mental and other sheaths (apart from the physical) immediately at death. It is said that it takes three years on the whole to get clear away from the zone of communicability with the earth—though there may be cases of slower or quicker passage. (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 569)

A soul can go straight to the psychic world but that depends on the state of consciousness at the time of departure. If the psychic is in front at the time, this immediate transition is possible. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 535-536)

The psychic world, like the vital and mental worlds, is a subtle world inhabited by beings. But its particular function is to be a place for rest for the evolving psychic beings between their successive earthly lives, as well as for the assimilation of their experiences in the previous life and preparation for their next incarnation.

It should be noted that the conditions of the future birth are determined fundamentally not during the stay in the psychic world but at the time of death—the psychic being then chooses what it should work out in the next terrestrial appearance and the conditions arrange themselves accordingly. (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 539)

The psychic being's choice at the time of death doesn't work out the next formation of personality, it fixes it. When it enters the psychic world, it begins to assimilate the essence of its experience and by that assimilation is formed the future psychic personality in accordance with the fixation

already made. When this assimilation is over, it is ready for a new birth—but the less developed beings do not work out the whole thing for themselves, there are beings and forces of the higher world who have that work. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 532-533)

The condition of the souls that retire into the psychic world is entirely static; each withdraws into himself and is not interacting with the others. When they come out of their trance, they are ready to go down into a new life, but meanwhile they do not act upon the earth life. There are other beings, guardians of the psychic world, but they are concerned only with the psychic world itself and the return of the souls to reincarnation, not with the earth. (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 539)

Sri Aurobindo beautifully and vividly describes the psychic world in his epic poem *Savitri*, in a canto called "The World-Soul." Here I quote a long passage from the canto describing the the psychic beings who are resting and preparing for their next birth.

Immersed in voiceless internatal
trance
The beings that once wore forms
on earth sat there
In shining chambers of spiritual
sleep.
Passed were the pillar-posts of
birth and death,
Passed was their little scene of
symbol deeds,
Passed were the heavens and hells
of their long road;
They had returned into the
world's deep soul.
All now was gathered into preg-
nant rest:

Person and nature suffered a
slumber change.
In trance they gathered back their
bygone selves,
In a background memory's fore-
seeing muse
Prophetic of new personality
Arranged the map of their com-
ing destiny's course:
Heirs of their past, their future's
discoverers,
Electors of their own self-chosen
lot,
They waited for the adventure of
new life.
A Person persistent through the
lapse of worlds,
Although the same for ever in
many shapes
By the outward mind unrecognis-
able,
Assuming names unknown in
unknown climes
Imprints through Time upon the
earth's worn page
A growing figure of its secret self,
And learns by experience what
the spirit knew,
Till it can see its truth alive and God.
Once more they must face the
problem-game of birth,
The soul's experiment of joy and
grief
And thought and impulse light-
ing the blind act,
And venture on the roads of cir-
cumstance,
Through inner movements and
external scenes
Travelling to self across the forms
of things.
Into creation's centre he had
come.
The spirit wandering from state
to state
Finds here the silence of its
starting-point
In the formless force and the still
fixity



And brooding passion of the
world of Soul.
All that is made and once again
unmade,
The calm persistent vision of the
One
Inevitably re-makes, it lives anew:
Forces and lives and beings and
ideas
Are taken into the stillness for a
while;
There they remould their purpose
and their drift,
Recast their nature and re-form
their shape.
Ever they change and changing
ever grow,
And passing through a fruitful
stage of death
And after long reconstituting
sleep
Resume their place in the process
of the Gods
Until their work in cosmic Time
is done. (pp. 293-294)

When the psychic being has rested and assimilated its previous life experience, and has formulated, in conjunction with the Jivatman, the outer personality and constituent tendencies for its next incarnation, it is ready for its rebirth in a new physical body. Here too there are variations in the process:

The time depends also on the development and on a certain rhythm of the being—for some there is practically immediate rebirth, for others it takes longer, for some it may take centuries; but here again, once the psychic being is sufficiently developed, it is free to choose its own rhythm and its own intervals. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 532-533)

Some psychic beings get into relation with the birth-environs

ment and the parents from the time of inception and determine the preparation of the personality and future in the embryo, others join only at the time of delivery, others even later on in the life and in these cases it is some emanation of the psychic being which upholds the life. (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 539)

Also when it comes to birth, it is not sure that the forces of the physical world will not come across the working out of what it wanted—its own new instrumentation may not be strong enough for that purpose; for there is the interaction of its own energies and the cosmic forces here. There may be frustration, diversion, a partial working out—many things may happen. All that is not a rigid machinery, it is a working out of complex forces. It may be added however that a developed psychic being is much more conscious in this transition and works much of it out itself. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 532-533)

This “working out of complex forces” is an idea that runs throughout much of Sri Aurobindo’s view of both life and death. Just as unexpected forces may influence the transition of the soul from the psychic realm to rebirth on earth, they may also influence the transition of the soul after death to its place of rest in the psychic realm, as well as its passage through life on earth. In addition to unexpected physical, vital and mental forces, there exist diabolical as well as divine forces that may intervene in the life of the individual and affect the soul’s trajectory of development. Such interventions typically occur due to some “affinity” in the person’s nature with

these forces, but since they are unseen and more powerful than the normal individual, they may also sweep the person off their intended road, at least for a time. Divine interventions, called grace, can provide protection and unexpected leaps in progress. While such unexpected movements are also part of God’s plan and can be foreseen by God at the highest levels of consciousness, the plan seems to be one that is more of an exciting and dangerous adventure for the journeying soul than a fixed travel route through marked and well-lit streets.

Comparison of the two perspectives

Walsch’s and Sri Aurobindo’s views of death and the afterlife converge and are similar in many ways. Both affirm the omnipresent existence of an all-knowing and all-loving God both in the world and beyond, as well as an eternal divine soul in the individual which passes from life on earth to an afterlife beyond and then returns to rebirth in a new body. Both also agree that the aim of life, or the aim of the succession of our many lives, is to consciously experience our unity with God in our earthly life. Both also agree that the experience immediately after death is at least partly created or determined by the individual’s beliefs and/or vibrational affinities during the previous life. For Sri Aurobindo, the state of the person’s consciousness at the time of death is particularly important in this respect. Both agree that temporary experiences of heaven or hell may occur that result from such beliefs or affinities, however, Walsch contends that even in such experiences of “hell,” the person does not suffer, but watches the scene as if removed from it, like watching a video. It seems that for Sri Aurobindo, such experiences may take on a greater reality



and insofar as the soul still identifies with the mental and vital parts of the being, may experience suffering during this period. In any case, both agree that there is no God-created hell to which souls go for punishment, and that the experience of “hell” is a temporary phenomenon in the transit of some souls to their reunion with God. Despite differences in conception, their descriptions of the experience of reunion with God is remarkably similar. For Walsch, after a temporary transit through various experiences after death, the soul enters into a complete immersion in a loving and all-blissful God at the core of Being. For Sri Aurobindo, after its transit through the vital and mental worlds the soul goes to the psychic world which is permeated with God’s love and bliss for rejuvenating rest and assimilation of the experiences of the previous life and preparation for its next rebirth. Both agree that it is the soul (or psychic being) that formulates the character and circumstances of the future life.

There are some points on which there are differences of emphasis, though not necessarily disagreement in principle. Walsch seems to emphasize the freedom of the soul, both in life on earth and in the afterlife. For example, one of the key formulas that Walsch emphasizes is the following:

It is impossible to live or to die without God, but it is not impossible to think that you are.

If you think that you are living or dying without God, you will experience that you are.

You may have this experience as long as you wish. You may end this experience whenever you choose. (*Home with God*, p. 2)

I think that Sri Aurobindo would agree with the first two statements, but that he would not accept the third

without some important qualifications. It seems obvious that it is not sufficient for the ordinary human mind to “choose” to experience God to “have” this experience. It is here that Sri Aurobindo’s view of the gradual evolution of consciousness as well as the laws of karma, of actions and their consequences, would come into play to obstruct the realization of such a choice. On the other hand, he would agree that a firm resolution of the soul to experience God and a subsequent conversion of the resistant parts of the mind and vital nature away from their natural propensities aligning them with the soul’s choice may well lead to a rapid growth towards the realization.

Walsch also seems to grant the soul complete autonomy in choosing the circumstances of its next life. Specifically, he says that at the Core of Being, having experienced Total Immersion with God, “In your moment of Free Choice, you decide, given all that you know, what you next wish to experience of Who You Are, through the physical expression of it” (p. 150). For Sri Aurobindo, the choice of circumstances for the next life appear to be conditioned by the previous line of development: by the soul qualities that have been assimilated from previous life experiences, by the various personalities and characteristics that have become organized around the psychic being, and by the natural next steps in a progressive growth of the soul. For example, the soul might select the life experiences of a soldier to enable the development of qualities such as courage or self-sacrifice that have been only partially developed or have been left undeveloped in previous lives for its future growth. Qualities that have been developed through specific types of experiences (e.g., romantic love) may be widened or given a new application through a different type of experience

(e.g., religious devotion). Moreover, previous personalities which are taken up for further development may carry certain karmic consequences which must be faced and worked through in a future life. At the same time, Sri Aurobindo does grant the psychic being a certain freedom in choosing the circumstances of its future birth: the specific personalities and characteristics that it wishes to utilize for its outer instruments in the new life, and the amount and type of karmic consequences that it wishes to deal with.

There are a few points in Walsch’s view which are more difficult to square with Sri Aurobindo’s perspective. One is the notion of the Holy Inquiry and the soul’s possibility of returning to life “a nanosecond before it ‘died.’” Here it should be noted that I have not fully described Walsch’s cosmology in which the possibility of alternative realities and time shifting would be possible. These possibilities derive from his proposition that “perception creates experience,” and here the perception takes place at the core of being. It may also be noted that from Sri Aurobindo’s perspective, both the past and the future do exist simultaneously with the present, and can be viewed in a single glance from a certain height of the spiritual consciousness. So possibly one should not discount the possibility of such a return to life too quickly. Be that as it may, these unusual ideas do not detract from the interesting, comforting, and inspiring aspects of his views which can be helpful to us in confronting both death and life.

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The secret Will

by James Anderson

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*This article describes the author's inner
journey to align his body to the Divine.
He uses some unusual tools to help him
in this way.*

*Whether it seem good or evil to
men's eyes,
Only for good the secret Will can
work.*

*Our destiny is written in double
terms:*

*Through Nature's contraries we
draw near God;*

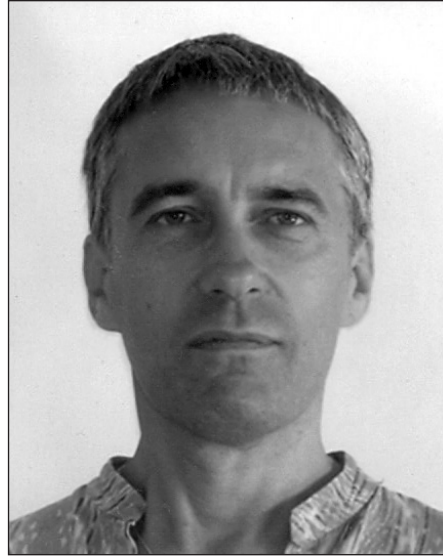
*Out of the darkness we still grow
to light.*

*Death is our road to immortality.”
(Savitri, p. 424)*

My teachers have unravelled so many mysteries before my eyes. They have taught me that behind the trudge of time there is a purpose and a plan; that within this unwinding process of evolution there is indeed an aim. The aim, they affirm, is an ever greater perfection. It is a perfection that is dynamic and never rests. As Sri Aurobindo affirms, it awaits the hour in man too: “The perfection of man lies in the unfolding of the ever-perfect Spirit.”¹

Without this goal, I feel, nothing else really has any purpose.

But a plan requires a will and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have also taught me that there is indeed a secret Will at work behind all things. It is secret because its work usually goes unnoticed—too refined for our gross senses to discern. But it is always present and Sri Aurobindo tells us that it works in every particle of the universe.



Reading about this will to perfection completely stirred my imagination when I started studying the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. At last I could grasp an explanation and even a solution behind the madness of everyday life. They simply made sense out of the senseless. The evolutionary sway, they stated, is working in every direction and every detail. It works in the vastness of the cosmos right down to the individual cell. The plan shapes and moulds the individual, the microcosm, as well as transforming the entire universe. It works, they explained, because it is involved in every range of consciousness. It works in every atom of matter itself and as the Spirit invades matter, the body assumes an intrinsic part of this transformation: it becomes a crucible for the entire process.

So knowing that there was, after all, such a plan, it was only logical for me to try to live in accordance with it. The Mother has often stressed the importance of identifying with the Divine Will and I largely received this approach with open ears. So when the command came, I was ready. I truly wanted it. At least the first prerequisite was present: the will to change. Without that, nothing is possible. But

the whole being needs to identify itself with this ideal. The body, not least of all, seemed to want to share in this perfection too.

First steps

It is a well-worn truth that if one wants to achieve anything worthwhile in this world, a will must be behind it. The Mother explains this point with typical clarity:

In order to accomplish something, one must have the will to do it, and to have the will to do it, one must know what one wants to do. If one doesn't know what one wants to do, one can't do it. First one must know, have a plan, a purpose, a programme if you like; one must know what one wants to do, and then one must will to do it, and then one can do it.²

But I believe that there is one thing that cannot go unheeded if this process is to take place. I feel that we need to make a few small steps on the path of knowledge. Put simply, we must somehow become more conscious of our inner and outer movements. We should try to bring this awareness to the front.

My first tentative steps were very hesitant indeed. Nevertheless, I found them very difficult to learn and, even now, I still occasionally find myself lapsing back into old ways. For some, including myself, this is not such an easy task. I had to learn to be awake and attentive to the body itself. I don't believe all of us realise what it really means to be alive in the body. If there is no experience, then no understanding can prevail.

Like most people, the body had largely been left unobserved from time of infancy, almost consigned to a state of 'auto-pilot'. The conscious-



ness was simply not awake and the body was left to often drowse. Even the wakeup call of critical illness didn't entirely shake me out of this state. Actually, the trauma induced a sense of recoil and distaste. It was only after I arrived in Pondicherry that I started understanding the importance of simply observing my whole nature. I also realised that the witness poise could extend over the entire being itself. I found that this process was necessary because all our parts are somehow confused and interconnected. Every movement creates an influence elsewhere and the last outpost is always the body. Everything seemed to eventually manifest there. For me, this simple revelation had a major influence in shaping a new affinity with the physical being itself.

The Mother's words very accurately describe the reason for this shift:

People usually do things so automatically and spontaneously, without watching themselves doing them, that if they were to ask themselves how it comes about, they would require some time before the process becomes conscious to them. You are so used to living that you don't even know how it happens....you are not even aware that the whole of life is like that. It seems quite natural to you, it is 'like that'. That means that you act in a way which is hardly semi-conscious; it is automatic, it is a kind of spontaneous habit and you don't watch what you're doing. And so, if you want to have some control over your movements, the first thing is to know what is happening....

Otherwise one is a kind of more or less coordinated medley of actions and reactions, of movements and impulses and one doesn't know at all how things happen....

But that is the *very first little step* towards becoming conscious of oneself in the material world.³

Somehow the Grace ensured that, from the beginning, these sort of answers very quickly rebounded back at me. I noticed too that my entire relationship with matter gradually got redefined. As the Presence is involved in all things, I was taught to treat all material objects with greater diligence

would probably discover that our 'will' is, to a considerable degree, nothing but a tangled bundle of instincts and desires.

Because such movements are dispersed, they may even collide or wrestle with one another in an attempt to achieve pre-eminence. This situation often retards the physical as the body will only receive mixed messages. As a consequence, the instructions lack clarity. The body can then often lapse into a state of total bewilderment and confusion. I also find that, in the worst circumstances, these competing 'wills' can drag the body down. I often find too that when they are enforced, the

body will often shrink. It yearns for guidance and leadership, yet withers when faced with coercion.

The true will is like an arrow fired precisely and directly at its target. Our whole being is behind it. But the reality is usually very different and our usual offering is rarely a homogenous whole. When the true will is present, all our energies get channelled to the point that needs most attention.

and care. This may sound like a minor detail, but as my attitude to material things refined, I soon realised that my perception of the body had started to shift too.

Divided will

The Mother says that, "...if you really want it, nothing in the world can prevent you from doing what you want."⁴

The true will is like an arrow fired precisely and directly at its target. Our whole being is behind it. But the reality is usually very different and our usual offering is rarely a homogenous whole. When the true will is present, all our energies get channelled to the point that needs most attention. But I feel that we often find ourselves being pulled in all sorts of directions instead of proceeding in a straight line. Also, if we are honest with ourselves, we

The Mother continues:

It is because one doesn't know how to will it. It is because one is divided in one's will. If you are not divided in your will, I say that nothing, nobody in the world can make you change your will...

To learn how to will is a very important thing. And to will truly, you must unify your being. In fact to be a being, one must first unify oneself. If one is pulled by absolutely opposite tendencies, if one spends three-fourths of his life without being conscious of himself and the reasons why he does things, is one a real being? One does not exist. One is a mass of influences, movements, forces, actions, reactions, but one is not a being. One begins to become a being when he begins to have a will. And one can't have a will



unless he is unified.

And when you have a will, you will be able to say, say to the Divine: 'I want what You want.' But not before that. Because in order to want what the Divine wants, you must have a will, otherwise you can will nothing at all. You would like to. You would like it very much. You would very much like to want what the Divine wants to do. You don't possess a will to give to Him and to put at His service. Something like that, gelatinous, like jelly-fish...there... a mass of good wills—and I am considering the better side of things and forgetting the bad wills—a mass of good wills, half-conscious and fluctuating....⁵

It might be fruitful to pause here and reflect on the Mother's use of words. It is now my understanding that there is only one way to truly unify the being. In truth, we are such a mixture. Underlying all our natures, Sri Aurobindo affirms, lurk the instincts, desires and impulses of our animal past. Perhaps the influence goes back even to plant and stone! So there is evidently a need for greater order. Initially, I had been taught that the mental will was the only effective way of achieving this. I don't believe that my upbringing was particularly unique and I guess that many people in the West, if not in India, may still swear by this too. The mental will has its uses: if the mind is the highest instrument that we have at our disposal, it certainly serves a purpose. Initially at least, I also found that this mental will somehow gave me the

grit to survive. It stopped me caving in but now I find it generally to be a considerable hindrance.

I believe that this is because the mind lacks the ability to harmonise. In its own domain, it can certainly organise and shed a certain light but it is not our true seat of knowledge. At best, Sri Aurobindo tells us, it can only modify those physical and life currents that course through our being. So if there is to be a way of unifying the being towards perfection, there must be a portion within us that is, indeed, true and perfect. That is the soul itself. The true will, for me, is simply the expression of that perfection that lies inside us.

I find that the psychic being expresses a true will and I find that this entity can guide the body in a way which is much more unpremeditated and spontaneous. The soul observes and then effectuates.

Willings

Sri Aurobindo is very precise in distinguishing between the divine Will and our mortal imitations. He describes the processes of our mental will as 'willings'. These willings are borrowed: they come to us second-hand. They emerge out of the ignorance and somehow always miss the mark when it comes to embracing the essential truth:

This divine Will is not an alien Power or Presence; it is intimate to us and we ourselves are part of it: for it is our own highest Self that possesses and supports it. Only, it is not our conscious mental will; it rejects often enough what our conscious will accepts and accepts what our conscious will rejects.⁶

Understanding this true will is very much a part of our ongoing education here. Although it is one thing adhering to Sri Aurobindo's teachings, I also believe that to truly realise this distinction more fully one must experience it. But so often His words act as a catalyst for the necessary experience. And the difference can be often quite subtle: I find the mental will can be quite crafty at times and it sometimes tries to masquerade as the definitive will. It is almost as if the mental will has an exaggerated sense of its own importance.

Distinction

Nowhere has the distinction become clearer to me than with work on the body. When I am standing in my truth, I know that a more potent will can spontaneously rise through me. I don't believe this is a unique experience because anyone can witness it for themselves. In a way though, it is unique because what we then see is the emergence of our inherent nature. It is my understanding that this nature is individual to each of us; it is all a part of the fascinating play of multiplicity.

I find that the psychic being expresses a true will and I find that this entity can guide the body in a way which is much more unpremeditated and spontaneous. The soul observes and then effectuates. And what it sees, it resolves. But sometimes I can even feel the two processes to be instantaneous. These are such precious moments in which one can become vast and free. To some extent, I might even find myself stepping outside this rigid framework of causality and time. Perhaps it is at such times that the cells



themselves can be illumined by the soul's flame.

So, in such circumstances, the physical being naturally finds a way of attuning itself to its own natural rhythm and the movement can become one of harmony and beauty. Somehow all the missing pieces seem to magically come together. These moments simply can't be coerced—the connection comes in glimpses and this kind of will rarely seems to impose. I have found the force to be very subtle and experience shows that any intrusion from the surface nature will disrupt the transfer immediately.

I can contrast this process with the sweat and toil of the mental will.

To some extent, I feel that applying it in this domain is like trying to plug a thousand holes in a leaking boat! The mind

simply does not have the capacity to attend to every detail. Eventually, it tires and wavers. It also loses patience. With bodywork in particular, it might be able to concentrate on one part of the body and create more order at that point. But it lacks the capacity to integrate—there are a countless details to fully master within the body and I find the mind quite incapable of keeping up. Harmony has to be instilled over the entire lower nature too, not just the body, for the physical being to operate in an optimum way. Because of this, a vaster vision is required and I know that this can only happen when the psychic being steps forward so that a truer will can manifest.

I now also find that the very effort of 'applying' the will to the body is totally counter-productive. This force simply cannot be coerced: it must be embraced. The sign of the true shift seems to lie in its spontaneity. I believe

that the domain of the true will is the soul itself and the very effort seems to inhibit the soul from stepping forward.

Alignment

I believe that if we want to manifest our truth, not least in the physical, we have to learn to align ourselves. I feel that this is work that each one of us can do. All of us have our own individual nature and embody a unique amalgam of cells. We also have a more conscious part of our being that can put them all back in order. This is our field of action. I believe that it is a matter of instilling harmony inside so that this state can radiate outside too. The

All of us have our own individual nature and embody a unique amalgam of cells. We also have a more conscious part of our being that can put them all back in order. This is our field of action.

body certainly depends on this inner harmony, perhaps more than we think. It seems to me too that as the true will starts its work inside the surface starts to change. I now feel this state of affairs very tangibly in the body. Because of this, if things get knotted and awry inside, I find that the body becomes a limp vessel. Everything becomes a huge strain. So perhaps that is one reason why the Mother emphasised the need to unify our being.

This process, I feel, amounts to aligning ourselves around the centre of our truth. Only then, as She says, can anything like a true will emerge. As the will is the expression of our nature we have to find our truth first. And without a true will, I don't believe anything worthwhile can be achieved in life. It is a conscious process, but whether done in a systematic way or not is perhaps unimportant. But if one is at all sincere, I don't believe it can ever be avoided.

We often hear the Mother talking about the 'searchlight' and that, in a very real sense, is what the vision of the soul represents. But creating the right station in the first place is so important. By calling for the help of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, I feel their guidance is always at hand. It is they who give me the answers and the channel they use appears to me to be the soul.

It is a little like searching through a cellar with a bright torch. When the mind is still, I can then quietly inspect every hidden corner with the light that She holds up for me. I usually start by inwardly observing from the top of my head and gradually move downwards.

When one begins watching deep inside, the outlook can indeed be very bleak. An enormous patience and persistence is required. Distortions may appear; resistances may emerge. At such times, I feel like I am being sucked into a huge dark hole. I have to hold on tight and follow wherever the torch leads me. Sometimes a little courage is required too. If a stain starts to surface, I try to penetrate it with an enquiring gaze. I plunge deeper and deeper into it in order to find the source of the difficulty.

But I always try to maintain a detached poise and not identify with the images that are appearing before me. This is truly a work one can do with the Mother. Long-buried patterns and habits start emerging; ugly patches may come to light. The natural tendency is to squirm but that is simply not necessary when She is by my side. Sooner or later, if one remains vigilant and connected, the answer will come. When it does, I find that it is the Mother who plucks the weed out by its very roots.



Harmony

Something new then begins to take over. The spontaneous knowledge brings a momentous shift. A light descends and saturates the entire nature. The twists of the mind start to unravel and the vital begins to somehow purify. The lower members can then reconvene at their true functions and place! A feeling of wholeness returns. It's as if all the fragments of consciousness have been magically drawn together. The body tangibly expands within this vibration of harmony and love. A new strength and vigour returns. The Mother's Force always brings something unique and singular, but inevitably, a peace will descend and in the hush of that silence a truer movement can emerge. It is a peace which is truly dynamic. A vast horizon might then open before my eyes.

At such times, I feel that something like a true will can manifest. Its hallmark is its spontaneity. The soul's command seems to attune automatically to the very fibres of the body. The work of outer alignment can now begin and it is all done in the stillness of the moment: nothing is spoken and ideally no thought intervenes. Essential links can be made between soul and matter.

These are precious glimpses but our nature is such that these moments are not easily sustained. Eventually the experience recedes and our physical being starts to contract. I often find that this secret Will arrives and withdraws almost unnoticed. At its departure, the mind sooner or later starts heaving again. So it is worth trying to prolong the contact at each time of sitting. A persevering nature is a great boon here because instant results seem to be rarely achieved, particularly when they relate to work on the body.

Transition

Sri Aurobindo affirms that raising our will to truer heights can be a long and rocky passage. This is one incapable trial that every aspirant must face:

For our human will is a misled and wandering ray that has parted from the supreme Puissance. The period of slow emergence out of this lower working into a higher light and purer force is the valley of the shadow of death for the striver after perfection; it is a dreadful passage full of trials, sufferings, sorrows, obscurations, stumblings, errors, pitfalls. To abridge and alleviate this ordeal or to penetrate it with the divine delight faith is necessary, an increasing surrender of the mind to the knowledge that imposes itself from within and, above all, a true aspiration and a right and unfaltering and sincere practice.⁷

For a long time, we find that we need to rely a great deal on our own effort. Indeed, as long as we remain in the realm of 'willings', we have no other choice. The Mother's comments are particularly appropriate:

And so, when one expresses 'willings', to be able to apply them in life and make them effective, some effort must come in — it is through personal effort that one progresses, and it is through effort that one imposes one's willings upon life to make it yield to their demands — but when they are no longer willings, when it is the true will expressing the true knowledge, effort is no longer required, for the power is omnipotent.⁸

Needless to say, this must also apply to work on the body. Personal effort is often very necessary. Otherwise, I feel, at times I would simply sink. But there comes a time when the effort itself becomes a 'bar'* to the intention of the Will to act upon matter. As the Mother says, the true will radiates a true power because it reflects a true knowledge. Here, I often seem to find myself in a twilight zone of half-answered questions and diminished responses. I feel that we somehow have to learn to climb higher and higher towards these summits of shining Truth. Sometimes that takes a colossal effort. Only then can we plunge down with greater power into the material abyss. The Mother says that "...we must rise higher in consciousness: the deeper one wants to go down into matter, the higher is it necessary to rise in consciousness."⁹

I believe that the energy for this ascent comes from aspiration. With aspiration, particularly in the body, the work becomes a joy. Without aspiration, I feel, one is only a part of that vast multitude of walking dead. Perhaps too, this aspiration provides the key to the 'Energy Inexhaustible' that the Mother speaks about. And if the cells of the body can truly aspire, I have a belief that the universe will eventually answer.

Difficulties

I think we all find that this transition brings many difficulties. It has become very evident to me that as I start orienting my life more inside, the work of alignment becomes increasingly critical. If one leads a superficial

*"When we have passed beyond willings, then we shall have Power. Effort was the helper: Effort is the bar." Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol. 16, p. 376.



existence, I guess that the physical tends to be more prone to material problems on the surface. But as one embarks on the path of yoga, the criteria change and inner influences start to hold sway. So the key, for me, is to keep aligned at all times. Each one of us has his or her individual nature, so the patterns and habits that cause disorder are indeed unique. However I believe that this simple solution of self-alignment is always at hand. When my body, for example, is moving in a mechanical way, it is a subtle but sure sign to me that something is not right inside. That innate joy is missing and there must be something blocking it. That means that there is a work to be done inside.

Even fatigue seems to usually come from a breakdown in alignment. There is an enormous reservoir of energy that is ever waiting to pour into and through us so one solution may be to look and see what is arresting it.

Obviously it is good to practise special sittings but I realise that this poise must eventually expand into everyday life too. It is a great challenge because, in such circumstances, I always find the consciousness being tugged onto the surface. Applying this alignment into action is the next stage, if you like, in this work of harmonisation. When I am engaged in movement and am able to maintain that poise, many difficulties are avoided. I try to lovingly remember the Presence and allow it to unceasingly radiate outside. This is one target I'd certainly like to reach and it is such a beautiful lesson in life. The Truth must manifest on the outside too. Somehow this brings to mind Sri Aurobindo's words on meditating in the battlefield....

I find that a sense of detachment truly helps too. Getting absorbed in a difficulty only identifies one more closely with it. It is better to heed Sri Aurobindo's advice and keep one's station above at all times. Yes, we must obviously learn how to inhabit our body but that presence will only expand without the stranglehold of attachment. That way, the possibility of eventual recoil is also avoided.

Will and resolution

I am convinced that a firm resolution is needed, but that can surely amount to more than mere mental conviction. The "will to conquer"

I also find that by sincerely entreating the Mother's help, the necessary energy invariably comes. Just to repeat Her name seems to strengthen my resolve. There is certainly something in the mantra of the Mother's name which solidifies this will.

must extend to "the very cells of your body."* That is a highly evolved state indeed, but if one can be resolute to the point of obstinacy, it can be more than a step on the way. One needs to be more stubborn than the obstacles one is facing. I feel that a patient perseverance is always required.

The supreme will never wavers, but I do feel that, by process of reaffirmation, these resolutions can merge into a more unflinching and true will. Perhaps it is a matter of degrees but I guess when one reaches the summit one will know the goal is reached. I also find that by sincerely entreating the Mother's help, the necessary energy invariably comes. Just to repeat Her name seems to strengthen my resolve. There is certainly something in the mantra of the Mother's name which solidifies this will.

Often too, I find myself compelled to draw a line on the past in order to make a fresh start. I find this work on the body must very often begin anew. In brighter moments, a new angle of approach may even come to light. It also helps to innovate, otherwise the work can become humdrum and stale.

Execution

To open the body to the true will is certainly an exercise in detail. Working from that centre inside, it almost amounts to a task of entire reconstruction. But is only a matter of awakening the body to its innate nature and the motive behind transformation is

to bring out the soul that lies dormant in matter. The soul can govern the body: my brief experiences have given me the necessary proof. Because of this, channels

must be built to every distant outpost of the physical being. The nerve endings themselves can become alive to the supreme Force. However, we can only offer our consciousness, because, in reality, it is the Mother who does the work.

I now find that inner alignment, though essential, is not sufficient for this work on the physical. It must be reinforced from outside too. Outer

**"Wake up in your self the will to conquer. Not a mere will in the mind but a will in the very cells of your body. Without that you can't do anything, e.g. you may take a hundred medicines but they won't cure you unless you have a will to overcome the physical illness." (The Mother, *Health and Healing in Yoga*. Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1979, p. 76)



alignment must be implemented: I find that some conscious motion and exercise is also necessary. The Mother tells us that the outer nature depends on the inner condition but, in order to complete the process, I feel that we need to be attentive to the surface aspects too. If one can remain alert and truly conscious when engaged in action, I'm sure that the work goes so much faster. The Mother says:

You see, if the matter is considered in its most modern, most external form, how is it that the movements we make almost constantly in our everyday life, or which we have to make in our work if it is a physical work, do not help, or help very little, almost negligibly, to develop the muscles and to create harmony in the body? These same movements, on the other hand, if they are made consciously, deliberately, with a definite aim, suddenly start helping you to form your muscles and build up your body. There are jobs, for instance, where people have to carry extremely heavy loads, like bags of cement or sacks of corn or coal, and they make a considerable effort; to a certain extent they do it with an acquired facility, but that doesn't give them harmony of the body, because they don't do it with the idea of developing their muscles, they do it just 'like that'. And someone who follows a method, either one he has learnt or one he has worked out for himself, and who makes these very movements with the will to develop this muscle or that, to create a general harmony in the body – he succeeds. Therefore in the conscious will, there is something which adds consid-

erably to the movement itself. Those who really want to practise physical culture as it is conceived now, everything they do, they do consciously. They walk downstairs consciously, they do the movements of ordinary life consciously, not mechanically. An attentive eye will perhaps notice a little difference but the greatest difference lies in the will they put into it, the consciousness they put into it. Walking to go somewhere and walking as an exercise is not the same thing. It is the conscious will in all these things which is important, it is that which brings about the progress and obtains the result. Therefore, what I mean is that the method one uses has only a relative importance in itself; it is the will to obtain a certain result that is important....

But you only have to try it, then you will understand very well what I mean. For instance, all the movements you make when you are dressing, taking your bath, tidying your room... no matter what; make them consciously, with the will that this muscle should work, that muscle should work. You will see. You will obtain really amazing results.

Going up and down the stairs—you cannot imagine how useful that can be from the point of view of physical culture, if you know how to make use of it. Instead of going up because you are going up and coming down because you are coming down, like any ordinary man, you go up with the consciousness of all the muscles which are working and making them work harmoniously. You will see, just try a little, you will see! This means that you can use all the movements of your life for

a harmonious development of your body.

You bend down to pick something up, you stretch up to find something right at the top of a cupboard, you open a door, you close it, you have to go round an obstacle, there are a hundred and one things you do constantly and which you can make use of in your physical culture and which will demonstrate to you that it is the consciousness you put into it which produces the effect, a hundred times more than the material fact of doing it. So, you choose the method you like best, but you can use the whole of your daily life in this way....To think constantly of the harmony of the body, of the beauty of the movements, of not doing anything that is ungraceful and awkward. You can obtain a rhythm of movement and gesture which is very exceptional.¹⁰

I often marvel at the mechanisms of the body. I occasionally notice how a particular movement will bring an involuntary muscular response. For instance, I sometimes realise, how the faintest strain in the neck might induce a clenching in the toes or an arching of the back. As Sri Aurobindo asserts, our body embodies a whole plethora of repeated patterns. However I feel that these habits will only disappear when we are able to direct our consciousness into them. It is truly such a work of perfection! I pray that this awareness will go on expanding in me too because my biggest stumbling block seems to lie in this attention to physical detail. But this is indeed the essence of working with matter, the nuts and bolts of the entire operation, if you like. A certain precision and exactitude is required



and above all one needs an indefatigable patience.

I sometimes observe people going about their everyday business. With a few, there is such a fluidity and grace in their gait: there is a sense of beauty in their steps! They carry such a light and they manifest it through their body. But it is not my job to replicate them. I have to find my unique rhythm and learn to express my own individual tune.

Essentially, I believe that this work with the body involves awakening the Truth that is involved in it: nothing more. When that happens, I believe that the body can indeed become the teacher. Inside is contained the knowledge of the true movement. That wisdom may be buried by habit or illness, so it is our task to recover it. Wholeness is its divine birthright. I feel that is why the Mother says that, “the body carries within itself the sense of its divinity. There. This is what you must try to find again in yourself if you have lost it.”¹¹

Largely for different reasons, this body has indeed been a teacher to me for quite a long time. One really needs to be very still to hear its whisper. Its voice is almost inaudible amidst the customary babble but at precious moments its intimations can indeed be understood.

The Supreme Will

As I look up, I realise that I have to climb ever so high to even touch the smallest ray of this Supreme Will. It is a perilous path and there is no secure footing: one false step and I will cascade to the ground. At times of doubt, I feel so alone and see no Guide to hold my hand on this precarious ascent. At times, this path can be so unremitting. Particularly with the work on the body, there are instances when

it is like standing against a huge wall. This wall symbolises the very denial of everything we are trying to implement. At such times, whichever way I turn, I come up against one more dead-end. These are colossal tests and unless one is armed with a true will one will just crumple into a heap. So should I try and assault this edifice myself? It would take a huge endeavour to achieve this feat.

Self-giving

Right at the beginning of my time here, I was indeed confronted with this prospect. Initially I had felt that every aspect of my being wanted to take this route: the way of *tapasyā* seemed to fit. But when the time came, when I *truly* asked myself, much to my surprise, a different answer immediately came. No, I now believe there has to be another way. Perhaps one can even entreat a higher power to demolish this wall! And this, for me, is where the Mother comes in. How else can such impossibilities become realities? As long as the Mother is present there is not just hope but certainty. Like many of us, I can often feel Her Force in action. That, for me, is the ultimate reassurance.

I don't believe there is any point in waiting for the next life for richer possibilities. We can always try to reach our aim in this life. Perhaps too, it doesn't necessarily have to be a long grinding haul. One look, one word or one single experience might perhaps be sufficient. One bold leap into the unknown may be all that is required. It helps to believe it can happen now.

Self-giving, I feel, carries us into a realm of perfect synchronicity. The Mother just takes over: this is the consummation of the supreme will. This surrender may sound very simple and if one is prepared to drop absolutely everything, I guess it is. But, in reality, it

usually takes a long time of preparation. It requires a considerable trust too. But I know from brief glimpses that once there, I enter a state of glorious freedom. A feeling of expansion pervades the entire being. But when the time finally comes, I believe it will be quite effortless. When at last the toil is over, I can simply melt at Her feet. I pray that we can all get there one fine day.

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11. Ibid. p. 164.

The present nature is ignorant and full of wrong actions and reactions. But there is a being within you, the psychic, which answers to the Truth and not to the Ignorance. If one turns to the Divine and becomes open, then this psychic being shows itself and gives to the nature the true thoughts, feelings, will, action.—Sri Aurobindo



Source material

Basics of Integral Yoga

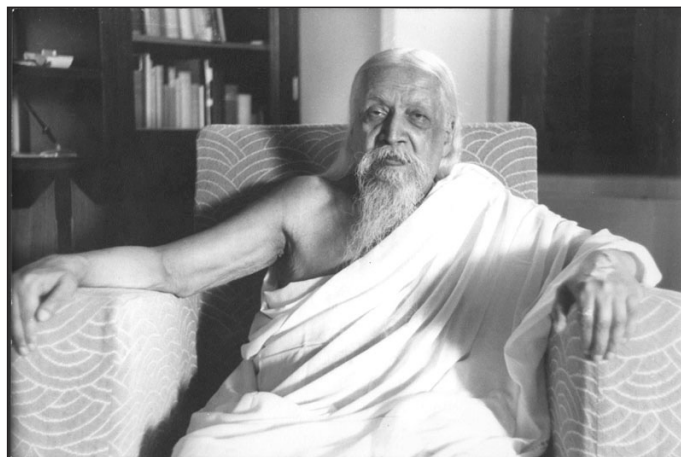
by Sri Aurobindo

[T]his is not a Yoga of Bhakti alone; it is or at least it claims to be an integral Yoga, that is, a turning of all the being in all its parts to the Divine. It follows that there must be knowledge and works as well as Bhakti and, in addition, it includes a total change of the nature, a seeking for perfection, so that the nature also may become one with the nature of the Divine.... One may begin with knowledge or with works or with Bhakti or with Tapasya of self-purification for perfection (change of nature) and develop the rest as a subsequent movement or one may combine all in one movement. There is no single rule for all, it depends on the personality and the nature. (*Letters on Yoga II*, p. 207)

Work as sadhana

The only work that spiritually purifies is that which is done without personal motives, without desire for fame or public recognition or worldly greatness, without insistence on one's own mental motives or vital lusts and demands or physical preferences, without vanity or crude self-assertion or claim for position or prestige, done for the sake of the Divine alone and at the command of the Divine. All work done in an egoistic spirit, however good for people in the world of the Ignorance, is of no avail to the seeker of the Yoga. (*Letters on Yoga II*, p. 232)

Men usually work and carry on their affairs from the ordinary motives of the vital being, need, desire of wealth or success or position or power or fame or the push to activity and the pleasure of manifesting their capacities, and they succeed or fail according to their capability, power of work and the good or bad fortune which is the result of their nature and their Karma. When one takes up the Yoga and wishes to consecrate one's life to the Divine, these ordinary motives of the vital being have no longer their full and free play; they have to be replaced by another, a mainly psychic and spiritual motive, which will enable the sadhak to work with the same force as before, no longer for himself, but for the Divine. If the ordinary vital motives or vital force can no longer act freely and yet are not replaced by something else, then the push or force put into the work may decline or the power to command



success may no longer be there. For the sincere sadhak the difficulty can only be temporary; but he has to see the defect in his consecration or his attitude and to remove it. Then the divine Power itself will act through him and use his capacity and vital force for its ends. (*Letters on Yoga II*, p. 233)

Meditation and concentration

Concentration, for our Yoga, means when the consciousness is fixed in a particular state (e.g. peace) or movement (e.g. aspiration, will, coming into contact with the Mother, taking the Mother's name); meditation is when the inner mind is looking at things to get the right knowledge. (*Letters on Yoga II*, p. 297)

Meditation means thinking on one subject in a concentrated way. In concentration proper there is not a series of thoughts, but the mind is silently fixed on one object, name, idea, place etc. There are other kinds of concentration, e.g. concentrating the whole consciousness in one place, as between the eyebrows, in the heart, etc. One can also concentrate to get rid of thought altogether and remain in a complete silence. (*Letters on Yoga II*, p. 297)

The method of gathering of the mind is not an easy one. It is better to watch and separate oneself from the thoughts till one becomes aware of a quiet space within into which they come from outside. (*Letters on Yoga II*, p. 302)

All thoughts really come from outside, but one is not conscious of their coming. You have become conscious of this movement. There are different ways of getting rid of them; one is to reject them one by one before they can come in; another is to look at them with detachment till they fade away. (*Letters on Yoga II*, p. 302)



Straining and concentration are not the same thing. Straining implies an over-eagerness and violence of effort, while concentration is in its nature quiet and steady. If there is restlessness or over-eagerness, then that is not concentration. (*Letters on Yoga II*, p. 315)

Love for the Divine

The love which is turned towards the Divine ought not to be the usual vital feeling which men call by that name; for that is not love, but only a vital desire, an instinct of appropriation, the impulse to possess and monopolise. Not only is this not the divine Love, but it ought not to be allowed to mix in the least degree in the Yoga. The true love for the Divine is a self-giving, free of demand, full of submission and surrender; it makes no claim, imposes no condition, strikes no bargain, indulges in no violences of jealousy or pride or anger—for these things are not in its composition. In return the Divine Mother also gives herself, but freely—and this represents itself in an inner giving—her presence in your mind, your vital, your physical consciousness, her power re-creating you in the divine nature, taking up all the movements of your being and directing them towards perfection and fulfilment, her love enveloping you and carrying you in its arms Godwards. It is this that you must aspire to feel and possess in all your parts down to the very material, and here there is no limitation either of time or of completeness. If one truly aspires and gets it, there ought to be no room for any other claim or for any disappointed desire. And if one truly aspires, one does unfailingly get it, more and more as the purification proceeds and the nature undergoes its needed change...

I should perhaps add one or two things to avoid misapprehensions. First, the love for the Divine of which I speak is not a psychic love only; it is the love of all the being, the vital and vital-physical included,—all are capable of the same self-giving. It is a mistake to believe that if the vital loves, it must be a love that demands and imposes the satisfaction of its desire; it is a mistake to think that it must be either that or else the vital, in order to escape from its “attachment”, must draw away altogether from the object of its love. The vital can be as absolute in its unquestioning self-giving as any other part of the nature; nothing can be more generous than its movement when it forgets self for the Beloved. The vital and physical should both give themselves in the true way—the way of true love, not of ego-desire. (*Letters on Yoga II*, pp. 338-339)

Taming the vital

The Mother

This is much more difficult than to sit upon a difficulty! It is much more difficult to stand back from the difficulty, to look at it as something which does not concern you, which does not interest you, does not belong to you, which belongs to the world and not to you—but it is only by doing this that you can succeed. This demands a kind of liberation of spirit and a confidence in your inner being: you must believe that if you take the right attitude, it is the best that will happen to you; but if you are afraid when something unpleasant happens to you, then you can do nothing. You must have this confidence within you, whatever the difficulty, whatever the obstacle. Most of the time, when something unpleasant happens, you say, “Is it going to increase? What other accident is yet going to happen!” and so on. You must tell yourself, “These things are not mine; they belong to the subconscious world; naturally I have nothing to do with them and if they come again to seize me, I am going to give a fight.” Naturally you will answer that this is easy to say but difficult to do. But if truly you take this attitude of confidence, there is no difficulty that you will not be able to conquer. Anxiety makes the difficulty greater.

Evidently there is one difficulty: in your conscious being something does not want the difficulty, wishes sincerely to overcome it, but there are numberless movements in other parts of your consciousness of which you are not conscious. You say, “I want to be cured of that”; unfortunately it is not sufficient to say “I want”, there are other parts of the consciousness which hide themselves so that you may not be busy with them, and when your attention is turned away these parts try to assert themselves. That is why I say and shall always repeat, Be perfectly sincere; do not try to deceive yourself, do not say, “I have done all that I could.” If you do not succeed, it means that you do not do all that you can. For, if you truly do “all” that you can, you will surely succeed. If you have any defect which you want to get rid of and which still persists, and you say, “I have done all that I could”, you may be sure that you have not done all that you should have. If you had, you would have triumphed, for the difficulties that come to you are exactly in proportion to your strength—nothing can happen to you which does not belong to your consciousness, and all that belongs to your consciousness you are able to master. Even the things and suggestions that come from outside can touch you only in proportion to the consent of



your consciousness, and you are made to be the master of your consciousness. If you say, "I have done all that I could and in spite of everything the thing continues, so I give up", you may be already sure that you have not done what you could. When an error persists "in spite of everything" it means that something hidden in your being springs up suddenly like a Jack-in-the-box and takes the helm of your life. Hence, there is only one thing to do, it is to go hunting for all the little dark corners which lie hidden in you and, if you put just a tiny spark of goodwill on this darkness, it will yield, will vanish, and what appeared to you impossible will become not only possible, practicable, but it will have been done. You can in this way in one minute get rid of a difficulty which would have harassed you for years. I absolutely assure you of it. That depends only on one thing: that you truly, sincerely, want to get rid of it. And it is the same for everything, from physical illnesses up to the highest mental difficulties. One part of the consciousness says, "I don't want it", but behind there hides a heap of things which say nothing, do not show themselves, and which just want that things continue as they are—generally out of ignorance; they do not believe that it is necessary to be cured, they believe that everything is for the best in the best of worlds. (*Questions and Answers 1950-1951*, pp. 72-74)

Is it not dangerous to say, "My movements are not mine, I have not to think of them"?

Yes, evidently, if you say, "I can do nothing, that belongs to Nature, the movement has to follow its natural course", you do exactly what I have told you not to do, you make use of the Divine as a fine cloak to cover the satisfaction of your desires. But the opposite movement, "I am good for nothing because such an idea has crossed my mind" is equally wrong, isn't it? Naturally, if an impulse happens to come to you which you do not want, the first thing to do is to will that it does not come again; but if, on the contrary, you do not sincerely want it to disappear, then keep it, but do not try to do yoga. You should not take the path unless you have resolved beforehand to overcome all difficulties. The decision must be sincere and complete. You will notice, besides, as you gradually advance, that what you believed to be complete is not so, what you considered to be sincere is not so, and then you will progress little by little; but to succeed you must have as total a will for progress as possible. If you have this will and if an impulse seizes you with violence, keep the will firm, your being must not vacillate; you must expect these things to come, but when they come, tell yourself, "Well, they come from below, I do not want them to recur, they are not mine."



This is not the same thing as saying, "Let it go, since it is Nature." There must already be a beginning of realisation in the vital for it to revolt against the impulses that come to it. Most human beings and even those who expect to do yoga say, as soon as the impulse comes, "It is quite all right, there is nothing to do, it is all right." Then, if something in you revolts, if something says, "I don't want it", that is the higher part of your being. What takes the resolution to do yoga is not your body or your vital, not even your mind, it is the higher part of your mind or it is your psychic being. It is that alone which can take the resolution—your body does not know very well what it is all about, your vital looks at the beginning of transformation with some anxiety, the mind with its ideas declares, "This can be done in that way, can be explained like this", and so on. So if you have made a resolution, it comes from the higher part of your being, and it is upon this that you have to take your support, not upon anything else—that is the "I". And it must understand in the end that it is not a personal "I", but universal and divine.

But is it not the vital itself which finally should take the decision to change?

I may assure you that the vital, left to itself, will never take the decision to be transformed—it is quite satisfied with itself and, over and above this, being an accomplice of the mind, the mind will furnish it with all possible explanations for whatever it does. People who live in their vital consciousness are, even when they do not say so, always very satisfied with themselves. They are also very satisfied with all that happens to them and they always say of their impulses, "How interesting it is, how interesting!" So, if you wait for the vital to take the decision, you may have to wait for a long time! You must teach your vital that it must obey. Before feeling any satisfaction, it must understand that it has nothing else to do but obey. (*Ibid.*, pp. 77-79)



The poetry room

From The Debate of Love and Death

O Death, thou lookst on an unfinished world
Assailed by thee and of its road unsure,
Peopled by imperfect minds and ignorant lives,
And sayest God is not and all is vain.
How shall the child already be the man?
Because he is infant, shall he never grow?
Because he is ignorant, shall he never learn?
In a small fragile seed a great tree lurks,
In a tiny gene a thinking being is shut;
A little element in a little sperm,
It grows and is a conqueror and a sage.
Then wilt thou spew out, Death, God's mystic truth,
Deny the occult spiritual miracle?
Still wilt thou say there is no spirit, no God?
A mute material Nature wakes and sees;
She has invented speech, unveiled a will.
Something there waits beyond towards which she strives,
Something surrounds her into which she grows:
To uncover the spirit, to change back into God,
To exceed herself is her transcendent task.
In God concealed the world began to be,
Tardily it travels towards manifest God:
Our imperfection towards perfection toils,
The body is the chrysalis of a soul:
The infinite holds the finite in its arms,
Time travels towards revealed eternity.
A miracle structure of the eternal Mage,
Matter its mystery hides from its own eyes,
A scripture written out in cryptic signs,
An occult document of the All-Wonderful's art.
All here bears witness to his secret might,
In all we feel his presence and his power.
A blaze of his sovereign glory is the sun,
A glory is the gold and glimmering moon,
A glory is his dream of purple sky.
A march of his greatness are the wheeling stars.
His laughter of beauty breaks out in green trees,
His moments of beauty triumph in a flower;
The blue sea's chant, the rivulet's wandering voice
Are murmurs falling from the Eternal's harp.
This world is God fulfilled in outwardness.
His ways challenge our reason and our sense;
By blind brute movements of an ignorant Force,
By means we slight as small, obscure or base,

A greatness founded upon little things,
He has built a world in the unknowing Void.
His forms he has massed from infinitesimal dust;
His marvels are built from insignificant things.
If mind is crippled, life untaught and crude,
If brutal masks are there and evil acts,
They are incidents of his vast and varied plot,
His great and dangerous drama's needed steps;
He makes with these and all his passion-play,
A play and yet no play but the deep scheme
Of a transcendent Wisdom finding ways
To meet her Lord in the shadow and the Night:
Above her is the vigil of the stars;
Watched by a solitary Infinitude
She embodies in dumb Matter the Divine,
In symbol minds and lives the Absolute.
A miracle-monger her mechanical craft;
Matter's machine worked out the laws of thought,
Life's engines served the labour of a soul:
The Mighty Mother her creation wrought,
A huge caprice self-bound by iron laws,
And shut God into an enigmatic world:
She lulled the Omniscient into nescient sleep,
Omnipotence on Inertia's back she drove,
Trod perfectly with divine unconscious steps
The enormous circle of her wonder-works.
Immortality assured itself by death;
The Eternal's face was seen through drifts of Time.
His knowledge he disguised as Ignorance,
His Good he sowed in Evil's monstrous bed,
Made error a door by which Truth could enter in,
His plant of bliss watered with Sorrow's tears.
A thousand aspects point back to the One;
A dual Nature covered the Unique.
In this meeting of the Eternal's mingling masques,
This tangle-dance of passionate contraries
Locking like lovers in a forbidden embrace
The quarrel of their lost identity,
Through this wrestle and wrangle of the extremes of
Power
Earth's million roads struggled towards deity.
All stumbled on behind a stumbling Guide,
Yet every stumble is a needed pace
On unknown routes to an unknowable goal.
All blundered and straggled towards the One Divine.

—Sri Aurobindo
(From *Savitri*, pp. 623-625)



When I have fears that I may cease to be¹

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charact'ry,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And feel that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love;—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

—John Keats

From Mont Blanc²

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
Visit the soul in sleep,—that death is slumber,
And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
Of those who wake and live. I look on high;
Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
The veil of life and death? Or do I lie
In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep
Spread far around and inaccessible
Its circles? For the very spirit fails,
Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep
That vanishes among the viewless gales!
Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,
Mont Blanc appears—still, snowy, and serene.
Its subject mountains their unearthly forms
Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,
Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
And wind among the accumulated steep;
A desert peopled by the storms alone,
Save when the eagle brings some hunter's bone,
And the wolf tracks her there. How hideously
Its shapes are heaped around—rude, bare, and high,
Ghastly and scarred and riven!—Is this the scene
Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young
Ruin? Were these their toys? Or did a sea
Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
None can reply—all seems eternal now.
The wilderness has a mysterious tongue

Which teaches awful doubt,—or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be,
But for such faith, with Nature reconciled.
Thou has a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
By all, but which the wise and great and good
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley

"Bright Be the Place of Thy Soul" ²

Bright be the place of thy soul!
No lovelier spirit than thine
E're burst from its mortal control,
In the orbs of the blessed to shine.

On earth thou wert all but divine,
As thy soul shall immortally be;
And our sorrow may cease to repine,
When we know that thy God is with thee.

Light be the turf of thy tomb!
May its verdure like emeralds be:
There should not be the shadow of gloom
In aught that reminds us of thee.

Young flowers and an evergreen tree
May spring from the spot of thy rest:
But nor cypress nor yew let us see;
For why should we mourn for the blest?

—Lord Byron

The newborn³

Muhammed spoke to his friends
about a newborn baby, "This child
may cry out in its helplessness,
but it doesn't want to go back
to the darkness of the womb.

And so it is with your soul
when it finally leaves the nest
and flies out into the sky
over the wide plain of a new life.
Your soul would not trade that freedom
for the warmth of where it was.



Let loving lead your soul.
Make it a place to retire to,
a kind of monastery cave, a retreat
for the deepest core of being.

Then build a road
from there to God.

Let every action be in harmony with your soul
and its soul-place, but don't parade
those doings down the street
on the end of a stick!

Keep quiet and secret with soul-work.
Don't worry so much about your body.
God sewed that robe. Leave it as is.
Be more deeply courageous,
Change your soul."

—Attar (trans. Coleman Barks)

The soul, like the moon³

The soul, like the moon,
is new, and always new again.

And I have seen the ocean
continuously creating.

Since I scoured my mind
and my body, I too, Lalla,
am new, each moment new.

My teacher told me one thing,
Live in the soul.

When that was so,
I began to go naked,
and dance.

—Lalla (trans. Coleman Barks)

In the silence of a moontide⁴

In the silence of a moon tide
That streaks the midnight sea
There dwells a deep fulfilment
That calls alluringly;
With whispers lend unspoken

To touch the witness Soul,
A fullness deep unbroken
That hints a Mystic whole.
And the waves they break in rhythm
Upon the sandy shore,
Each one at last effacing
The one that went before.
And the heart it knows one answer
To all that is no more.
In the silence of that moontide
The waves break to adore.

—Roger Harris

To Phillippa⁴

(who died on 3rd July 1975)

My heart goes out in flame and dream
To linger by your childbright soul,
You were sunlight on a shimmering stream,
The laughter of light on a crystal bowl;

You did not dance but flow and sweep
Through windy shining wildfire days;
Touching your truth I cease to weep,
For your golden smile within me says,

"Behind each sorrow soars a silent joy,
Each blind despair a secret splendour brings,
Why do you mourn that crazy broken toy?
I fly to God on singing, strong fresh wings."

—Lady Jean

Fire⁴

Cast these dreams
Into the fire
Watch them burn—
Then rise, not toward resurrection
But such perfection death cannot touch.

—Anuradha Legrand

1. Fiona Pagett (Ed.) *Thousand years of spiritual poetry*. London: Chaucer Press, 2003.

2. Elliott Coleman (Ed.) *Poems of Byron, Keats and Shelley*. Garden, City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1967.

3. Robert Bly (Ed.) *The soul is here for its own joy: Sacred poems from many cultures*. Hopewell, NJ: ECCO Press, 1995.

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Apropos

I told you about those activities at night (I have no impression of sleeping, and yet the body is perfectly at rest), in which there are people who are living and people who are “dead” in ordinary language—and they are absolutely alike. Except that the living seem still to have egoistic reactions, which the others don’t have. But it’s ... (fluid gesture). —The Mother

I believe there are two sides to the phenomenon known as death—this side where we live, and the other side where we shall continue to live. Eternity does not start with death. We are eternal now. —Norman Vincent Peale

A little while and I will be gone from among you, when I cannot tell. From nowhere we came, into nowhere we go. What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset. —Chief Crowfoot

My sun sets to rise again. —Robert Browning

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun? —Kahlil Gibran

It is the secret of the world that all things subsist and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and afterward return again. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our fear of death is like our fear that summer will be short. But when we have had our swing of pleasure, our fill of fruit, and our swelter of heat, we say, we have had our day. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

He who loses his mother loses a pure soul who blesses and guards him constantly. —Kahlil Gibran

The dead don’t die. They look on and help. —D.H. Lawrence

It is very beautiful—over there. (his final words) —Thomas Edison

If this is death, it is easier than life. (his final words) —Robert Louis Stevenson

Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal. —St. Thomas More

This world we live in is the dance of the Creator. Dancers come and go in the twinkling of an eye, but the dance lives on. —Michael Jackson

What happens after death is so unspeakably glorious that our imagination and our feelings do not suffice to form even an approximate conception of it. The dissolution of our time-bound form in eternity brings no loss of meaning. —Carl Jung

There are far, far better things ahead, than any we leave behind. —C.S. Lewis

Eternity is now. Right now, right here, you’re an infinite being. Once you get past the fear of death as an end, you merge with the infinite and feel the comfort and relief that this realization brings. —Wayne Dyer

Life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one. In the depths of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond; and like seeds dreaming beneath the snow, your heart dreams of spring. Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity. —Kahlil Gibran

It is good to have a reminder of death before us, for it helps us to understand the impermanence of life on this Earth, and this understanding may aid us in preparing for our own death. He who is well prepared is he who knows that he is nothing compared with Wakan-Tanka, who is everything; then he knows that world which is real. —Black Elk

