

# Collaboration

Fall 2018

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 43, No. 2



**Creating Isabella by Noel Parent •**

**Some voices of the American yoga by John Robert Cornell •**

**Responses to “Some voices...” by Wolfgang Aurose and Karen Mitchell •**

**The soul that played itself: ‘Blind’ Willie Johnson by Rick Lipschutz and Amanda Emerson •**

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



## About the art on the front and back cover

**Front cover:** "Antelope Canyon" by hikersbay.com. A visit to the canyon, located near Page, Arizona on Navajo Nation land, begins as the traveler enters through a slit in the cliff wall and climbs down into the canyon's cool, dark depths where stream waters have sculpted the sandstone interior. From the sky above, bright light finds its way through cracks and openings to illumine the patterns taking shape in the dark.

**Back cover:** "Sandstone—The Wave" by Norman Bosworth shows sculpted sandstone characteristic of the Antelope Canyon area.

## The authors and poets

**Wolfgang Aurose** ([wjsr@gmx.net](mailto:wjsr@gmx.net)) is an author. His newest upcoming book is *The Power of Co-Creativity: How your Inner work can Transform your Country*. See: [www.sunwolfcreations.com](http://www.sunwolfcreations.com)

**Peter Cooke** ([peter.d.cooke12@gmail.com](mailto:peter.d.cooke12@gmail.com)) is a British devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who has been writing poetry for many years. He is currently also engaged in writing a biography of P. B. Shelley.

**John Robert Cornell** ([johnrobt@cal.net](mailto: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.

**Dakshina** ([dakshina.sasp@gmail.com](mailto:dakshina.sasp@gmail.com)) is a founder/director of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, an ashram in Lodi, CA.

**Amanda Emerson**, distant cousin of RW Emerson, descendant of farmers, Micmac and Penobscot natives, self-described Spoiled Child Of God, doer of odd jobs, poet-dreamer, now edits Rick Lipschutz's book.

**Fiona Fraser Jehu** ([fionafraserjehu@hotmail.com](mailto:fionafraserjehu@hotmail.com)) is a Scottish devotee whose work and passion is in the field of Environmental Medicine, that is, how our environment is affecting our biology and also how we can consciously influence our own biology.

**Rick Lipschutz** ([lipschutzr@gmail.com](mailto:lipschutzr@gmail.com)), a sadhak, lives in western Massachusetts where he is writing *The Soul That Makes Us Matter* and participating in a pilot project in Open Dialogue Therapy.

**Karen Mitchell** ([karenmitchell404@gmail.com](mailto: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

**Ravi Narayanan** ([ravi@ssbiochem.com](mailto:ravi@ssbiochem.com)) is a long time devotee of Mother and Sri Aurobindo and a frequent participant at the monthly retreats at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham.

**Noel Parent** ([earthyoga@hotmail.com](mailto:earthyoga@hotmail.com)) is an American sadhak living in Auroville who writes poetry and children's stories. His children's book, *Yaroslava's flowers*, and book of poetry, *Transcendent Sky*, along with other writings and audio recordings, are available at: [storyyoga.wordpress.com](http://storyyoga.wordpress.com).

**Jean Toomer** (born Nathan Pinchback Toomer, 1894–1967) was an African American poet and novelist.

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## From the office of Collaboration

In this issue, we start with Current Affairs and an article by Dakshina on the passing of a beloved devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Zackaria Moursi, whose essays have appeared in *Collaboration*, and whose translations of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings into Arabic have helped bring their teachings to Muslims throughout the world. In Briefs, we have news from various centers and study groups in North America. AV almanac follows with an essay by a British visitor to Auroville about her positive and negative perceptions of the community which she now plans to join. In the Salon, we have an inspiring children's story by Aurovilian Noel Parent.

Our first featured essay is by John Robert Cornell presenting several distinctively American expressions of spirituality for the twenty-first century. He begins with scientifically-oriented analyses of the growth and extinction of species, with a focus on the parallels and prospects for Homo sapiens. John Robert then turns to Native American views of the relationship between humans and the environment which turn the dominant perspectives on their head. In this view, instead of searching for what we can take from nature, we seek for the gifts that we can bring to nature, and one of the most important gifts human beings can bring is gratitude. But in reorienting our association with nature it is first necessary that we recover the stories of our ancestors who had this perspective.

The second featured essay is by Rick Lipschutz and Amanda Emerson and concerns the expression of the soul in the music of 'Blind' Willie Johnson, a gospel blues musician of the early 20th century, and thus also concerns the American soul. The authors describe the life and music of Johnson, with an emphasis on their ramifications for the nature and finding and expression of the soul, or psychic being in Sri Aurobindo's parlance. I found that the essay became more alive and meaningful by listening to some of Johnson's music, which is available on YouTube, and reading the lyrics at: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/blind-willie-johnson-lyrics.html>.

We further develop the theme of the soul in Source Material, which features selections from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother about the realization and finding of the psychic being, as well as in the Poetry room, which includes poems reflecting on Native American spirituality and the legacy of slavery in the American experience. We conclude with Apropos quotations on the soul.

We welcome Karen Cornell as *Collaboration's* new artistic editor. For this issue she has selected the photographs for the front and back covers, and has drawn the illustrations for John Robert Cornell's article.

### Invitation to submit a short essay

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 November 1, 2018 to the editor at: [editor@collaboration.org](mailto:editor@collaboration.org).

### The artists

The images for the front and back covers were free downloads from pixabay.com, a photography website. The photographer for the front cover was identified as hikersbay.com from Poland. The photographer for the back cover was identified as Norman Bosworth from Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.

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

**About SAA:** The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current members: Lynda Lester, president; Mateo Needham, vice president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Margaret Phanes, communications officer; Mira Patel, director; Ananda Bhishma, associate and treasurer.

**Contributions:** Donations for the work of the SAA, Auroville, and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram may be sent to SAA. Donations are tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.



## Current affairs

### Passing of Zackaria Moursi

by Dakshina

On 14 May 2018, our spiritual brother and companion on the road to the “Life Divine,” Zackaria Moursi, left his body and this earthly realm. He was 75 years of age.

As many of you know, he had gone through open heart surgery last August, from which he gradually recovered, but then suffered a debilitating stroke in mid-November that left him gravely impaired. In some ways over time, his condition slowly and sporadically improved, and a team of dear friends and ashram residents were witness to his struggle and journey as we took turns being with him at the nursing facility for some time each day. But, in other ways, his body was just unable to overcome the severe incapacity of his condition. In the last month, friends pitched in together to hire a caregiver to come and be with him for an extra two hours a day to help with physical therapy, read to him, play music, and wheel him out into his beloved sunshine. This dear young woman became in Zack’s words, his “angel” and “breath of Spring” in his life.

During the long months of his ordeal, Zack was often straddling two worlds: one very much in the physical and all its frustrating challenges and limitations, the other connected deeply to his inner life of sadhana and an inner reality that he often confused with the outer, where he was back at the Ashram, able to traverse stairs, visit the meditation hall, or walk the corridors of the nursing facility and among other things make an appointment to meet Sri Aurobindo. He sometimes believed much more in this inner reality than in his confinement to bed or wheelchair.

Zack was born in Egypt and had a materially privileged, though lonely, upbringing at a time when Islam was more tolerant, open-minded, and progressive. At a young age he discovered the joy of reading all kinds of literature in his father’s marvelous library and the world of books became his refuge and later his life’s calling pursued through academic studies.

During the tumultuous times following the revolution in Egypt in the 1950s, after his family lost most of their possessions and his father died, Zack put all of his efforts into his academic studies hoping to win a scholarship to study abroad. At the age of 20 he realized this dream and found himself doing post-graduate work in Germany. There he

became acquainted with Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga through a German compilation, *Der Integrale Yoga*, and felt these inspired words filling a void that all his intellectual pursuits had not been able to.

A profound turning point came when halfway through his doctoral program he fell into a severely debilitating depression where life had no more purpose. At a crucial moment of despair he remembered the Integral Yoga book and gazed at Sri Aurobindo’s photo which shifted something deep within, leading slowly but surely out of the depression and into the beginnings of his spiritual life. In Germany he met and married his wife, a fellow scholarship holder, but soon found an insurmountable conflict growing between his outer married life and inner spiritual life. Though his wife was sympathetic and they continued the marriage for 30 years, moving from Germany to Cairo, to the U.S., in the end they parted as dear and respected friends and Zack was free to pursue his sadhana unencumbered. This led him to Auroville, back to the U.S., to Switzerland, back to Cairo, changing life paths, careers, and relationships, still finding the challenge of the outer circumstances at odds with the inner ideal.

Finally at the end of a short visit to Auroville 10 years ago, he received the Adesh, the inner command (and in this case also the outer command) of what he ultimately understood to be a kind of fulfillment of his life’s purpose: to translate Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s works into Arabic. In 2008, Zack returned to the Lodi Ashram and devoted half his time to Ashram work and half to his translation work and to the development of his website which served as a vehicle of outreach into the Arab and Islamic world, to allow some Light of Sri Aurobindo’s teachings to penetrate into the chaos and barbarism of fundamentalism that is raging there. The translation work continued to expand with the publication of three books and numerous essays and articles. He continued to grapple with ways to reach the Islamic psyche in a non-threatening way, inviting Muslim readers to perceive the possibility of a spirituality that grows naturally out of the Islamic faith into a wider Light.

In Zack’s words, “The reason I have left Egypt to spend my remaining years in an ashram dedicated to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is that I find this ashram to be, for me, the most suitable place to deepen, in and around myself, that solid peace...the peace on which, in the long run, a divine life can be established on earth.”

Note: Zack’s translations, books, articles, as well as other material, are available at his website: <http://sriurobindo-inarabic.com> which will continue to be maintained.



## Briefs

**Matagiri.** Outstanding Indian classical vocalist, Pandit Shantanu Bhattacharyya will be joined by his wife, Durba, on harmonium and Pandit Ashish Sengupta on tabla. They will play an afternoon concert on Sunday November 11th at Matagiri a part of a celebration of Matagiri's 50th and the completion of Auroville House. Suggested donation is \$20 per person. Please call 845-679-8322 to confirm your attendance or write to [info@matagiri.org](mailto:info@matagiri.org). Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, 1218 Wittenburg Rd. Mt. Tremper, NY.

**Cultural Integration Fellowship**, founded in 1951 by Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri and Mrs. Bina Chaudhuri, continues to offer a rich array of lectures, Sunday morning services, and cultural events. CIF offers Sunday morning services at its ashram located at 2650 Fulton Street, San Francisco. In commemoration of the birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, we feature Integral Yoga topics in the month of August.

On August 5 this year, Lopa Mukherjee presented her documentary film on Sri Aurobindo's life. Debashish Banerji spoke on Sri Aurobindo's teachings on August 12. Stephen Julich spoke on Mirra, the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, on August 19, and Kundan Singh concluded the series on August 26 with a talk on Integral Yoga and Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri.

We invite you to join us for our Sunday morning programs. Seeking a new synthesis of past wisdom and future aspirations, CIF's highest goal is a world in peace and harmony. Please come to our programs and become an active member! Your participation is much appreciated. Please visit our ashram and our website: [www.culturalintegration-fellowship.org](http://www.culturalintegration-fellowship.org) for more information.

**California Institute of Integral Studies** is presenting a conference September 29–30 titled "1968 Revisited: (Whatever happened to) Revolution, Counterculture, Pedagogy, Utopia?" This three-day conference explores the ideas and forces surrounding the founding of CIIS in 1968—a worldwide discontent with the conditions of human living and the dream of creative utopia. It seeks for common threads uniting a new pedagogy, a greater psychology and an experimental philosophy with the student riots in Paris and Berkeley, the San Francisco counterculture and the founding of Auroville, a spiritual community in India. The conference will be held at Namaste Hall, CIIS, 1453 Mission St., San Francisco, CA, and is sponsored by the CIIS East-West Psychology Program. See: [www.ciis.edu](http://www.ciis.edu).

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

Daily blog posts advancing the readings in Sri Aurobindo's major works continue at <http://sriurobindostudies.wordpress.com>. All prior posts remain archived and accessible for those who want to study them.

The Institute also sponsors regular classes on reiki, levels 1, 2 and 3, conducted by Karuna Krinsky. The schedule is regularly updated and can be found at [www.reikiteacher.org](http://www.reikiteacher.org)

Institute for Wholistic Education, 3425 Patzke Lane, Racine, WI 53405; 262-619-1798; [www.wholisticinstitute.org](http://www.wholisticinstitute.org).

**The Foundation for World Education** invites grant applications from individuals, programs and groups who share the vision of a transformed world espoused by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. All proposals must be presented to the FWE through the auspices of a nonprofit organization and are subject to review by members of the board before a decision is taken. Next due date for main granting session is January 7th. Proposals should be emailed to the secretary: [info@FoundationForWorldEducation.org](mailto:info@FoundationForWorldEducation.org).

The **Yoga Center Amherst** now offers Matrimandir Meditations every Tuesday and Thursday morning led by Julie of Light Omega, who invokes the light of the Matrimandir and invites those present to be nourished. We also continue to offer retreats in Ramgarh (at Madhuban) in October and Auroville in February. For more information: [www.yogacenteramherst.com](http://www.yogacenteramherst.com).

**East Bay Integral Yoga** group meets on the first Sunday of the month at 10:15. We are currently, and perhaps for ever, reading Savitri. See <https://www.meetup.com/The-East-Bay-Integral-Yoga-Group> for more information.

**A study group** led by Roger Calverly in Lindsay, Ontario has a regular meditation on Monday evenings from 7 to 8 pm, with a reading from the Mother's works at the end, and then a short talk on the topic of the reading, with questions and answers. Address: 72 Bond St. W., Lindsay Ontario, Canada K9V 3R4





## *AV almanac*

### **A determined pilgrim's impressions of Auroville**

by Fiona Fraser Jehu

*Reprinted from the June-July 2018 issue of Auroville Today*

**I**knew that Auroville was my place the moment I read about it, now almost twenty years ago. The teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother resonated with me deeply, I loved the Auroville Charter and, even though I had grown up in the West, it was India that always felt like home.

As a very young child I remember looking around at the world from my pushchair and wondering whether I had come to the right planet. It was clear that the human society in which I found myself was severely lacking in a few fundamentals: joy, wisdom and brotherly understanding for example, as well as a complete lack of what I would call natural law.

The resolution of this discrepancy between how the world is and the beautiful loving home that it could be, was too great for me to ignore, and so, like many of us at this point in time my *raison d'être*, my mission in this life, has been to 'be the change' I so dearly wish to see in the world—to the best of my ability. That change which, as Sri Aurobindo and Mother reminded us, is inevitable—as it is a Law of the Universe, is it not, that all and everything tends towards harmony, even though it may meander and diverge somewhat en route.

When I first visited Auroville in 2001, the ecologically ideal, ultra-conscious utopia I had envisioned in my rose-tinted imagination was not exactly what I found here. My first impressions were of the—dare I say it—junk food being sold in the Pour Tous Purchasing Service (PTPS) together with the toxic chemical laden cleaning products and personal care items filling the shelves. Having been an organic obsessed eco-warrior for most of my life, I struggled with the reply I received from the sweet lady in the Pour Tous office to my question as to why these items were being sold in a 'conscious community'. She replied: "because people want to buy them". "Couldn't they go to Pondy?" I politely responded—to which she faintly smiled and raised her eyebrows.

I felt a little disheartened, but rather than distancing me



Fiona.

from Auroville it served only to fuel my determination to come to live here.

The next surprise I was met with was the number of motorcycles on the roads. "Shouldn't everyone be riding bicycles?" I naively asked myself. I imagined there'd be bicycle rickshaws on every corner for those who weren't able to cycle themselves. This way we'd be creating employment, staying green, and using a transport solution that's amenable to shared journeys. I guess it's simply not a very efficient method of getting around compared with just hopping on a moped and moving at speed directly from A to B. After all, everybody is so busy: with places to go, people to see, work to do! It's also just as cheap, and sometimes even slightly cheaper, to hire a moped than it is to hire a bicycle, and it can be very hot cycling in summer. I remember one afternoon in June, having cycled from Kottakarai to Nilatangam in the blazing sunshine, with two heavy bags balanced on the handle bars and my clothes stuck to me with sweat, contemplating whether it may be prudent for me to place 'saving the planet' on hold whilst I hired myself a moped!

Another interesting observation I made was that there seemed to be a distinct lack of road signs here. Was this deliberate perhaps? Although regularly getting lost in the forest was a little frustrating I couldn't help thinking that if a lack of road signs serves to deter the casual tourist from visiting Auroville then it may be a good thing—by serving as a filter such that only the determined pilgrim will persevere and stay.



I was heartened to see the sign outside the PTPS which read: "Mobile phones are harmful to birds." My 'inner knowing' had always alerted me to the fact that high frequency microwave radiation is damaging to human, animal and plant biology, now well evidenced, so I was relieved that Auroville shared this awareness, or so I thought at the time.

My fondest memory of this growing township was the magnificent forested areas which were heroically created by those early settlers who transformed a desert wasteland into a lush green haven for humans and animals alike. For this I feel enormous gratitude. The forests are teaming with life, with prana and so are very healing and nurturing, and extremely necessary to Auroville's wellbeing. I often feel that what trees give us is underestimated.

I also remember the Matrimandir which in 2001 was only partially constructed, and feeling a sense of awe and excitement that one day it would be completed in all its splendour. Mother was clearly inspired in her understanding of the importance of creating such a sacred space in the heart of Auroville, a place of sanctity where the earnest resident or visitor can find solace and a peaceful vibration amidst our challenging worldly lives.

And so now, almost 17 years later I am back in this crazy, wonderful city in the making, this time to stay, to form roots and make my home here.

So what has changed? Well the healthy, Auroville-made range of delicacies has expanded. More motor cycles (including my own TVS), and noticeably more cars too, plague the Auroville roads; and a few more road signs have appeared, just for major landmarks.

The sign warning about the dangers of mobile phones still stands in the same place, but surrounding it many people are absorbed in their smart phone conversations and text messages—seemingly oblivious to the silent message being broadcast beside them. As is the case in the world at large, cell phone towers and wi-fi are gradually infiltrating the whole of Auroville. In my humble opinion this proliferation of microwave frequency radiation throughout our community is having—and will increasingly have—significant negative repercussions.

'On verra,' as the French say. I guess pressure from society as a whole makes it quite difficult to avoid 'being connected' 24/7, and I know that a large number of Aurovilians welcome this, seeing it as progress whilst others feel it to be a retrograde step. It is undoubtedly an extremely contentious and controversial issue but I'm sure all would agree that it is prudent to fully educate ourselves on this matter before forming any concrete conclusions about its safety or otherwise.

The forests look to be thriving and the Matrimandir is quite magnificent now, while the ongoing work on its surrounding gardens will create a delightful natural complement, just as Mother envisaged.

What has changed most though, in these past 17 years, is that I have changed. I am a little wiser and a little more capable of seeing the magic behind the more easily visible exterior which hit me in the face all those years ago. That magic is the multiple layers of Auroville, the enormity of the great work which goes on in the background on myriad differing projects, all inspired by the desire for a better world.

I think my disappointment on first visiting Auroville twenty years ago was due to my own naivety, as perhaps all of our disappointments in life are caused by our own naivety. Wherever there is a centre of Light it attracts pure souls who wish to grow in Love, Truth and Freedom, but it also inevitably attracts those whose role it is to thwart the efforts of those who are well-intentioned. This is simply the nature of duality, and should not dissuade us in any way, from our noble endeavours.

When I reflect upon Auroville as a whole there is one thing I do know for sure, and that is that I love this place with all my heart and soul, and I care deeply about its future. And the most beautiful thing is that I meet others here who feel the same, and it is this true spirit of human unity and shared intent that will bring about the realization of Mother's dream. The imperfections that may be apparent to us can be the impetus for action on our part to transform them into something great—and there is so much learning to be had in the process!

I will end with a quote from the well known German writer and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "There is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitively commits oneself, providence moves too. Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

Auroville is contesting a National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) approved plan to build a new four lane National Highway through the Auroville Greenbelt and across the Auroville Main Road near Kuilapalayam village. Whereas the NHAI has agreed to relocate the highway 200 meters east and slightly outside the Master Plan area, it would still cross the Main Road and adversely affect several Auroville communities near Kuilapalayam. Auroville has proposed alternative routes north of the city that would be less disruptive but these have not been accepted. See the August issue of *AV Today* for details.



## Salon

### Creating Isabella

by Noel Parent

Somewhere in our big universe there once was a little Soul named Isabella.  
Isabella had her own special world all to herself.  
But in the beginning of Isabella's world, at first, there was nothing.  
No, there was nothing at all....only Isabella.  
Then in one magical moment, Isabella wanted to create something.  
So she took a deep breath and, as she opened her eyes, her own world began to emerge.  
Shapes and forms and colors of all kinds started to play all around.  
But Isabella wanted more....Isabella wanted something beautiful.  
So she imagined a paintbrush and began to paint.  
Wandering rivers and skies of soaring blues,  
majestic mountains and trees of brown-hinted greens,  
golden-haired meadows sparked with rainbowed flowers.  
All that Isabella painted came alive and seemed to dance along with her.  
She climbed her mountains and strolled through her fields,  
she smelled the flowers and breathed the sweet air.  
And Isabella was happy.  
But after a while, she began to feel that something was missing.  
Isabella wanted some friends.  
So upon a large stone boulder she began to paint again....  
and after a few brushstrokes a white-headed bird took shape and flew off into the sky.  
So she painted more free-flying birds, some wild running horses, an enormous elephant and.....one lazy but curious cat.  
And Isabella was happy....  
But still she felt that something was missing.  
So again Isabella began to paint all around her....and there appeared at once all kinds of different people in her world.  
People of all the different colors and types that one could imagine.....  
People with long legs, people with short legs, people with big heads, people with little heads.....  
And even some people with large fancy wings!

Some of the people laughed, and some of the little ones cried.....some of them ran and some of them swam.....  
and some of them did tricks while others just watched.....  
And then there were others who began to create for themselves.....  
And Isabella was even more happy.  
But once again, after some time, Isabella felt something was still missing.  
This time Isabella decided to close her eyes and close her ears to everything else in her world.  
She remained very quiet, and there in that silence, she began to listen and to feel.  
After a little while, Isabella began to feel a part of herself she had not felt before....she began to feel her very own Soul in her very special Heart.  
In that Soul, she saw a beautiful Light that was brighter than anything else she had ever seen, and she felt something so beautiful that she had never felt before.  
"But how to create this wonderful feeling in my world?" she wondered to herself.  
"How to paint this beautiful feeling that is who and what I am?"  
And at that moment Isabella's eyes and Soul together opened wide.....  
And with a gesture of her hands, magically she began to paint billowing waves of flowing rainbow lights that were the living heartbeats of Isabella's Love.  
And with another gesture of her hand there appeared vast glowing masses of sparkling Color that expressed the Joy of Isabella's creation.  
All that Isabella painted was Her, and she painted all that she was.  
She painted herself in all her beauty and love.  
She painted her Peace with seas of silvery green.....  
She painted her Joy with melodious streaks of white-hued pink.....  
She painted her Hope with soaring flares of yellow-lined orange.....  
She painted her Strength with bold columns of golden red.....  
And finally, she painted the Eternal Freedom that is her Smiling Soul with an endless glowing burst of golden white radiance.  
And in that Moment, Isabella discovered something....  
Isabella discovered her very own Truth...but a Truth that belonged to everyone as well.....  
Isabella discovered that she was her own Creation.  
And so Isabella continued.....Creating Isabella.





## Essays

### Some voices of the American yoga

by John Robert Cornell

#### There is no them

Suppose we assume that there is an American yoga, an authentic spirituality of the American soul, widely recognized or not. And this yoga is the country's contribution to the world's rollercoaster ride from matter to mind and to something beyond, call it beyond-mind or supermind. Suppose that the United States is not India, and is highly unlikely to have the yoga of the Indian soul. Still the US, like all nations and peoples of the world, has its own part to play. And suppose that as it evolves, it brings its unique gifts and methods to the grand party of the world's peoples.

Now imagine a detective hunt, looking today for clues to this American soul and its yoga. Where could we find threads or traces of that American yoga, and how would they relate to Integral Yoga according to Sri Aurobindo and Mother?

Take Ken Cloke<sup>1</sup> as an example. Judge Cloke discovered that the win-lose structure of the court cases he presided over often did not heal the wounds of the conflicting parties. So he studied mediation and tried it when the parties were agreeable. Gradually he realized that he could not help anyone in mediation until he became *awake to the stuckness within himself* that was aligned with the place where the conflicting parties were stuck. He found that there is an energy stream or flow *inside himself* that is key to his



work. When he succeeds in unblocking the stuck place in his own inner energy, he can say or do something that enables the conflicting parties to move past *their stuckness* towards reconciliation. He has moved gradually in his life from outside to inside, until he finally came to the realization that there is no us-and-them. There is only us.

*There is only us...*

There is a beauty to this movement from below or outside, which starts on the surface of our awareness and our institutional knowledge, then crawls and slogs across intermediary understandings until it bursts into the wideness and epiphanies of the inner world. This movement seems to be a recognizable pattern in the playground of American yoga.

Let's sample some instances of this movement from below and try to find an evolution going on but hidden in the noise of our time.

#### The state of our species

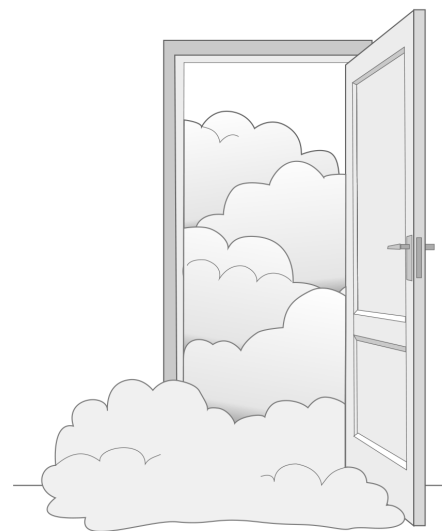
Charles Mann is haunted by bacteria in a petri dish.

He once watched Lynn Margulis show a time-lapse video to a college biology class. The star of the show was *Proteus vulgaris*, a bacterium that

ordinarily makes its living in the human gut. The video showed *P. vulgaris* reproducing in a petri dish—a shallow, transparent dish with a flat lid. When Margulis started the projector, the class saw a small bubble of bacteria wobbling in the dish. Soon the cells in the video exploded into action, shivering, boiling, multiplying exponentially until a quivering mass of cells filled the screen. There was an audible gasp in the room. In thirty-six hours, Margulis told the class, this single cell organism could cover *the whole Earth* a foot deep in *P. vulgaris* slime!

#### Mann and Margulis

Charles Mann is a gifted storyteller and an award-winning American journalist. He has tunneled deeply into the science, history, and archeology tumbling out of academic and research institutions in the last several decades recording the state of the Western hemisphere before Columbus arrived. His 2005 book, *1491*, tells a fresh story of the land and people of the Americas before European contact. *1491* refutes long-held narratives of European superiority, mastery, and inevitability, with their consequences





of ethnic cleansing and environmental destruction that remain with us today.

Mann lived in the same town as Lynn Margulis (1938-2011). She was a ground-breaking evolutionary biologist who championed the power of *cooperation or symbiosis* in evolution instead of the exclusive emphasis on competition favored by the neo-Darwinists. She transformed our understanding of cellular biology by proposing that the contents of the cell nucleus evolved from the symbiotic union of previously independent bacteria! Genetic evidence later validated this thesis. She helped expand our model of the tree of life, from two kingdoms to six (plants and animals plus fungi, protists, and two types of bacteria); and she was the co-developer, along with James Lovelock, of the Gaia hypothesis.

Margulis was enamored of Earth's microorganisms. She once told Mann that they were far more creative and effective than large forms of life. They make up 90% of living matter and have radically transformed Earth's atmosphere and soil.

## What about us?

But what about us? Mann wanted to know.

Margulis admitted that humanity is unusually successful, but added that every successful species eventually annihilates itself.

Bacteria in a petri dish are a good example. Their population follows a predictable curve of stages: slow growth—exponential growth—leveling of growth—and collapse.

A petri dish is, of course, an artificial environment. In *P. vulgaris*' natural setting, the intestines, competition plus lack of food and other resources prevent this unconstrained growth cycle. But a few species manage to escape their natural limits—for a while. They

overwhelm their environment following the petri dish curve, which ends when they destroy themselves, starving and drowning in their own waste.

As the catalog of terrestrial destruction caused by humanity grows and our population roars towards ten billion, Mann wondered if we will end up like petri dish bacteria, a wildly successful species that breaks out of its natural limits, overcomes all competition, and eventually devours its own basis of life. So he began researching our species, *homo sapiens*. What has made us so successful? he wanted to know. What are human beings anyway? Where did we come from and where are we going? What is human nature, if there is any such thing?

People have wondered about the great questions as far back as we have record. These questions can lead one to study philosophy, religion, or yoga. But Mann is a science and history journalist, so he plunged into the scientific literature to find answers. The result was an acclaimed 2012 essay called "The State of the Species,"<sup>2</sup> in the prestigious American journal *Orion*.

## Lousy companions

Mann found one clue to his search in an odd place—the sleuthing of Mark Stoneking on body lice. In 1999 Stoneking received a warning about an outbreak of lice at his son's school. An evolutionary biologist, Stoneking began poking around in the literature on human body lice and found a peculiar genetic split in the most common species of lice living on human bodies. One subspecies, called the *head louse*, feeds and lives on the scalp. The second subspecies, the *body louse*, feeds on skin but can survive for more than a few hours *only in human clothing*! That's strange, but Stoneking began

wondering if that fact hid a secret about the evolutionary relationship between humans and their louse companions. He reasoned that if he could show when the two subspecies of lice split from their common ancestor, he would have a good indicator of when humans began wearing clothing. The body louse subspecies could not have existed before then.

Using the new methods of genetic science, Stoneking and several colleagues estimated that the separation between the head louse and the body louse subspecies occurred about 70,000 years ago.

## The great shift

That our ancestors began wearing clothing about 70,000 years ago would not be a surprise to researchers in human evolution. Many other new skills and behaviors developed around the same period. Our species, *homo sapiens*, first appeared in the archeological record about 200,000<sup>3</sup> years ago. It remained remarkably the same for its first 140,000 years, with no evidence of change during that time. We have had the same *physical* appearance and structure for the whole 200,000 years, but by 50,000<sup>4</sup> years ago humans "suddenly"—in geological time—had developed language, art, complex tools, clothing, burial ceremonies, and perhaps religion. And we had exploded out of a very narrow slice of Africa and spread across the whole planet. In other words, *anatomically* modern humans of 200,000 years ago blossomed into *behaviorally* modern humans about 50,000 years ago, after 150,000 years of being little more technically advanced than contemporary chimpanzees.

What happened? How did this great shift take place?

No one is sure, but Mann ac-



cepts common scientific opinion that favorable genetic mutations around the time of this change increased the brain's ability to innovate and that this increased capacity enabled these human inventions. But what caused these successful mutations after millennia of stagnation? What pressure of the environment made these mutations more favorable for survival?

Again, no one is sure, but Mann's essay explores some ingenious hypotheses that researchers have put forward. Whatever answers they settle upon, it is clear that since homo sapiens 2.0 appeared 50,000 or so years ago, the human population has spread out around the globe and increased from perhaps a few hundred individuals in a small slice of Africa to 5 million by about 10,000 years ago.

## Phase two

Then we invented agriculture.

If the increase of our numbers during the period from 50,000 to 10,000 years ago was the slow growth first phase of the petri dish curve, the agricultural revolution started the exponential explosion of the second phase. Mann traces the development of agriculture, from the first known use of wild (*pre-agriculture*) ancestors of today's domestic cereals like barley and rice by early humans 105,000 years ago, through natural mutations that made these grains more suitable for farming, to deliberate genetic modifications and the transformation of natural "food deserts" like the American Midwest and the Ukraine into the breadbaskets of today. Of agriculture, he writes, "Instead of natural ecosystems with their haphazard mix of species (so many useless organisms guzzling up resources!), farms are taut, disciplined communities conceived and dedicated to the maintenance

of a single species: us." Mechanized American corporate agriculture is the culmination of this single-minded exploitation of the land and the destruction of anything that gets in the way of this exploitation.

So successful has agriculture been that the human population has jumped from about 5 million to 7.5 billion since the invention of agriculture, a 1,500-fold increase. By 1996 a team of Stanford biologists estimated that a single species—humanity—used or dominated 50% of the biologically productive land base of the whole Earth! By the year 2000 humans were using fully half of the world's accessible fresh water. It becomes clear why some scientists are now calling the current era the Anthropocene.<sup>5</sup>

## Unnaturally different

Will humans continue the explosive growth and consumption, Mann wondered, until, like the bacteria in the petri dish, we use up all of Earth's resources, poison the environment with CO<sub>2</sub> and plastic, and then catastrophically crash, carrying with us most mammals and many plants?

The prose in "The State of the Species" is articulate and engaging, full of examples and potent metaphors. The author lights candles in the caves of the ancients. Dim details of the past pop into view everywhere. We gain new insight.

Under pressure of the destructiveness of the Anthropocene, Charles Mann wants to know if humanity is different from the rest of life in some fundamental way. We had better be, he reasons, because if we want to survive the worldwide disruption and destruction we are creating, humans are going to have to do something so daunting and unnatural that no other species has ever done it—*constrain our own success—*

despite being biologically hard-wired to focus on the immediate and the local. He admits that we need large scale "transformations" to avoid collapse, but the transformations we need "would be pushing against biological nature itself."

## Who are we really?

But even if humanity can find the self restraint, what is the proper course to pursue?

Competing ideas are everywhere, along with many who claim that the whole crisis is a hoax and resist any change to the status quo. It's not just a matter of inventing new, more benign technologies. Somehow we have to dig deep enough to find some unifying key. And even then do we have time to make the necessary changes? Industrial agriculture, for example, may be deadening the natural productivity of the soil, polluting rivers, and creating huge dead zones in the oceans around the great river deltas of the world; but right now it feeds billions. No one knows how to feed the same billions with organic agriculture and permaculture. New technologies need time to be tested and deployed properly lest they cause more problems than they solve.

The last big change to humanity, 50,000 years ago, was the birth of mental humanity proper, we might say. In Mann's assessment, it released astounding creativity in the human brain and plasticity in our behavior. He invokes those two qualities, creativity and plasticity, to answer the great questions in a way that supports his hope that humanity can do the impossible and defy our twenty-first century rush to self destruction.

Our species *is* amazingly adaptive, homesteading from the frozen Arctic to the steamy Amazon jungle to the fiery Kalahari Desert. And hu-





manity has shown remarkable ability to change even the foundations of social life in the course of a few decades. Slavery, for example, which was integral to the fabric of human civilization for millennia, nearly disappeared completely from the world during a few short decades in the nineteenth century. Mann credits creativity and plasticity for this and other advances, like the American civil rights movement and the ongoing changes in the status of women.

But in the comments after the online version of his essay, Mann concedes that our chances for avoiding collapse do not look good.

### Dimensions of a national yoga

It might be tempting to criticize “The State of the Species” for the narrowness of its assumptions. Western science’s practical materialism usually precludes any discussion of the mind in favor of what is measurable—brain, behavior, and genetics. Spirit is a no show for the same reason. Creativity is a wedge here, but it does not lead the author to investigate his own subjectivity or that of our species, despite the huge part it played in the creation of his essay and in the discoveries of its subjects, individual and collective.

But in addition to noting limits of Mann’s analysis, let’s see if we can view his work and the work of the others in this essay as examples and dimensions of an American yoga. If every nation has a soul, and that soul has something to offer to the evolving symphony of human unity, is it possible to see the American soul expressing itself through the thick crust of national ego? What is the American soul trying to develop through its current instruments? Can we glean anything about the national yoga in this way?

Let’s make the attempt.

By integrating discoveries from many disciplines, “The State of the Species” does display a growing holism in Western science. And it begins to consider seriously who we are and where we are going. Instead of rushing forward with the current paradigm of control and exploitation, or hunkering down in a swamp of cynicism and despair, Mann steps back and raises the great questions. And he gives us an example of the best thinking of the materialist worldview. He gathers the research and stories of the observer of life looking on events and evidence outside himself—the view of science—curious about the world, intrigued by its mysteries, dreaming up explanations and then honing them against the testimony of the senses and the blade of logic.

This method gives new meaning to the word precision. It conjures theories from a few bones or a scattering of ancient pollen in a cave. It probes the mysteries of the minuscule and the humongous, looking for coherence, for surprise, for delight. And it discovers miracles out there. It widens and enriches our knowledge: galaxies that were born near the birth of the universe itself, tiny fragments of protein that carry invisible qualities down the generations, bits of ash in the strata of a hillside that remember volcanic explosions tens of thousands of years ago and thousands of miles away, cave paintings that open the imagination to the beginnings of symbolic thought on the planet.

And since so much of America’s thoughts and actions are entwined with materialism, this may be a good place to start our investigation. The American soul, at least the Euro-American aspect of it, seems to have a predilection for a bottom-up approach. We have no highly-developed, integrated philosophy or spiritual heritage to inspire and inform this work. So we

start from the ground, from matter, from the measurable, long before we look upward or within. Materialism may even prove to have its benefits for yoga, especially a Yoga that is not complete until the transformation of matter itself is accomplished.

### The party’s over

Richard Heinberg narrows our focus from 200,000 years to the last few centuries. He sometimes compares life today where he lives in Sonoma County, north of San Francisco, with life of the Pomo Nation, an indigenous people who inhabited the same area several hundred years ago.<sup>6</sup>

### The Pomo

First close your eyes and clear your mind.

Now look with fresh eyes into the past: Before Europeans arrived, the Pomo were a peaceful people of about 15,000 living in many small villages in the area. They wore no clothing except in winter, when men wore a cloak and women a skirt made of redwood bark. Each village was family—everyone was related—and each had a dance house and a sweat lodge for healing and ceremonies. An elder settled disputes. Everyone knew intimately every stream and hill, every species of herb and bush and tree, frog and lizard, insect and mammal in their surroundings. They collected food easily from this abundance: nuts, seeds, berries, roots, greens, fish, deer. From childhood everyone learned how to build a dwelling, gather food, and treat common illnesses with local plants. Infant mortality was high, but elders often reached 80 years or more. Cancer and heart disease were very rare. People worked for their basic needs three or



four hours a day. The rest of the time they spent in play, conversation, story telling, ceremony, crafts. Few traveled beyond the natural boundaries of their villages and hunting-gathering areas. It was a relatively happy, easy life, powered by human, animal, and plant energy and nature's cycles.

Close your eyes again and clear the screen.

Now look again: Today nearly 500,000 people live in the same area. Almost no one can build a house or make their own clothing. Inhabitants commonly know few if any of their neighbors. There are many one parent families and many people living alone. You can easily walk or drive around all day in a Sonoma city without seeing a relative or even a familiar face. Daily food typically comes shipped from strangers in distant, unknown places and produced in unnatural ways. Few people know the source of the fresh water from their faucets, and children can identify far more commercial logos than species of local plants. Settling disputes can be impossibly expensive and time consuming in the complex, multi-level judicial system. The work day is typically eight hours—often more for the lower economic classes. Today's inhabitants are unable to imagine the life cycle of most of the common objects in their neighborhood or town. Most of the tables and chairs, TVs and air conditioners, hamburgers and cornflakes, cars and eighteen-wheelers, tractors and phones of this society were produced far away and are powered by fossil fuels extracted from distant lands at unimagined costs to soil, life, and atmosphere of our one home.



## A once-only extravaganza

Peak oil is not just an abstract marker on the charts of Exxon's critics. The cheap, abundant, concentrated sunlight called petroleum and its kin, coal and natural gas, are exponentially more powerful and convenient than any energy source humanity ever had. This new energy gave birth to something breathtakingly different from anything that came before—industrial society, which is now worldwide. It powered the explosive economic growth and geographic conquest of the last three hundred years, a change in scope akin to the agricultural revolution 10,000 years ago. This Industrial Revolution anchors itself on three pillars: *endless economic growth* and progress, *consumerism* to perpetuate that growth, and *capitalism* for the private management of production and enrichment of its owners. The abundant fossil fuel energy of this age has altered every aspect of life. Here are two examples among a multitude.

• Agriculture was a *supplier* of energy (as food) for pre-industrial societies, but today agriculture is a net *consumer* of energy because of its dependence on artificial fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides made from fossil fuels, not to mention transportation and packaging of produce plus the damage to the health of soil, water and life these additives cause. Heinberg says that the US food system of today consumes 12 calories of energy for every food calorie delivered to the final consumer!

• The number of people that lived in cities before the Industrial Revolution

## Peak oil

Richard Heinberg is a violinist, a gardener, and the Senior Fellow at the Post Carbon Institute, a nonprofit think tank in California. He is a respected, published expert on energy systems, especially fossil fuels, in industrial societies. He made his name investigating the notion of peak oil and studying its consequences.

Petroleum is a finite resource on a finite planet. Since today's civilization is extracting and burning oil faster than we are finding new accessible sources, it must at some point become too expensive and too destructive to the environment to extract and refine. Peak oil refers to that point. Once the recognized economic and social cost of producing oil exceeds the price society is willing to pay, production from the mighty petroleum industry will begin to decline, taking much of industrial civilization down with it, Heinberg says. If we haven't already passed peak oil, we are rapidly approaching it.



tion was fewer than 10 percent. The mass urbanization of today, now more than 50 percent of global population, is recent and relentless, driven by the cheap fossil fuels of our time.

But this has been a *one-time* only energy extravaganza. Once burned, fossil fuels are gone forever.

## The party's over

As the bonanza of cheap fossil fuels comes to an end, so does our era. We are seeing the resulting fractures in society's institutions more clearly every year.

I remember when gasoline was 19 cents a gallon. Long gone. *Easy-to-get* petroleum was pumped and burned years ago. Today tar sands or fracked oil and seabed petroleum are keeping the business afloat, but they are hideously expensive and dangerous to produce. Burning coal is even more dangerous to life and already more expensive than renewable energy today. The banner across the climate-warming sky is getting clearer each year. Every country in the world signed the Paris Climate Agreement.<sup>8</sup> Saudi Arabia, king of oil and sand, has announced the unthinkable: its intention to invest future oil dollars in solar energy instead of more oil extraction! At the recent One Planet Summit in Paris, the president of the World Bank announced, to protracted clapping and cheers from the assembled dignitaries, an end to its upstream investment in oil and gas beginning in 2019.

Cheap fossil fuels have been a previously unimaginable energy windfall for humanity, but *they are not renewable*. The party is inevitably coming to an end. In fact, *The Party's Over* is the title of Richard Heinberg's 2003 book. What peak oil really means, he says, is an end to economic growth and the contraction and re-ruralization of society. He argues that no energy source

on the horizon—not solar, wind, nuclear, hydrogen—alone or in combination is remotely capable of keeping today's industrial civilization running before the whole thing collapses. In other words, there is no technological fix. No one can predict the future, but the evidence<sup>9</sup> Heinberg provides is detailed and compelling.

Consider machinery. It is ubiquitous in our lives today. Think of the Pomo for contrast. Even the technical saviors of today's thinking, solar and wind energy, rely on petroleum-driven machinery for mining, transporting and manufacturing the turbines and panels that deliver "clean" energy. In some places, old solar panels are themselves becoming a waste problem! Perhaps technical issues like these could be worked out given enough time, says Heinberg; but there are other technical as well as huge political and psychological problems to be solved before renewables can replace fossil fuels.

## Meanwhile, time...

Meanwhile time is of the essence.

Climate disruption from greenhouse gases produced by fossil fuels is becoming visible for everyone to see even in a wealthy country like the US. In 2017 three major hurricanes devastated parts of the southern and eastern US. Hurricane Harvey squatted over Houston, TX for five days, unloading more water than any storm in US history. Hurricane Maria destroyed lives, buildings, electricity, clean water and hope in Puerto Rico. Hurricane Irma, the most powerful storm ever documented in the Atlantic, became "only" the third most expensive hurricane in American history as it ripped through Florida. The Tubbs Fire, one of 9,000 California wildfires in 2017, destroyed more than 5600 *homes* and killed 22 people in suburban California.

Meanwhile already 20,000 scientists from 184 countries as of this writing have signed the "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice," which was published in 2017.<sup>10</sup>

Global finance is another reason for swift action.

Just a decade ago the gears of the immense financial system that lubricates industrial civilization for the whole world nearly froze solid, setting off the Great Recession and coming within a hair's breadth of triggering the Great Depression 2.0. The fatal contradictions in global finances that gave us both events came more clearly into view this last round, *but this time they were not corrected!*<sup>11</sup> Because of this failure<sup>12</sup> another economic collapse is probably just around the corner. And because of the extreme globalization of industry and finance today, it will probably be far worse than the Great Depression of the 1930s. Most of us no longer live on farms to provide food and shelter when the cargo ships from China and the trucks from Mexico and California grind to a halt and unemployment skyrockets. World leaders are unlikely to organize a renewable energy Marshall Plan during the chaos of such a global economic and social meltdown. Meanwhile global warming and the other plagues of industrial civilization—economic inequality and political corruption, land and water pollution, the sixth mass extinction, top soil loss, dead zones and plastic islands in the oceans, destruction of the world's forests...—march on.

## System overshoot

But here Richard Heinberg switches to a wider view. The real problem, he says, is not peak oil, global warming, or any of these other crises. They are all symptoms of the real problem, which he defines as *system overshoot*.<sup>13</sup> Cur-





rently humanity uses 1.7 times more resources than Earth can produce<sup>14</sup> each year. As India, China, Brazil, and other developing countries approach the material consumption of the US and Western Europe, that overreach can only grow. We have a problem, Houston, a problem of math and physics.

Also biology. To Heinberg, industrial civilization is the boiling bubble of bacteria in the world petri dish approaching overreach and collapse. The question is not whether it will happen. Unending economic growth on a finite planet is an impossibility. Every civilization is born, grows, and dies. The question instead is whether we can intervene deliberately, quickly, and intelligently enough in this runaway tsunami to create a soft landing instead of a violent collapse.

### Toxic knowledge

For Heinberg, the situation that our way of life faces today is dire. “We are approaching one of history’s great discontinuities,” he wrote in 2017. All signs of his investigation into industrial, social, and political science and history point to a near term collapse of global industrial civilization. “Basing our entire economy on the ever-increasing rate at which we burn a finite fuel supply is the very definition of stupid,” he wrote.<sup>15</sup>

Heinberg calls the realization that our civilization *today* is hanging by a thread “toxic knowledge,” because it is difficult or impossible for most of us, living in our well-worn habits of morning coffee and evening TV, to imagine that our whole way of life may be gone in a decade or two.

He is part of an ongoing conversation among the relatively few who acknowledge the deep nature of the current situation. This conversation, he says, is focused on two strategies

for a soft landing: convincing policy makers of a backup plan and developing local resiliency. In either case he thinks a re-ruralization of society is inevitable. Fossil fuels and their machines enabled the exponential flight of the world’s population to the cities over the last century. But with the coming demise of this easy energy, there is no safe equivalent energy source in the foreseeable future to maintain today’s urban centers, much less the ten billion people predicted by 2050.

“We have to change everything, including our entire economic system—and fast,” he writes.<sup>16</sup>

### A practical foreshadowing

Richard Heinberg is the practical American mind at work. He’s a careful thinker. He comes to these alarming conclusions reluctantly. Over four decades he has written 13 books and more than 300 monthly essays (*muselatters*) for a growing audience, trying to make sense of our predicament. His analysis is rich and detailed and intelligent. He engages systems thinking and ecology to bring together the siloed branches of scientific and social know-how for more interconnected understandings and solutions. He outlines what is happening in detail and what we need to do on a practical, material level.

He investigates the “happiness movement” and argues for an “evolutionary leap” of inclusiveness and cooperation. A “soft landing” is still possible for humanity as it leaves behind the material bounty of the Industrial Age, he says. A reboot of civilization could even *benefit* humanity if we could organize a different way this time. A simpler life without consumerism could shift to more indigenous values and behavior and also to more exploration and development of the spiritual potential of humanity.

Heinberg doesn’t write about these possibilities with the conviction that he gives to the technical and policy changes humanity needs to make, but his writing leaves room for them. He acknowledges that we are not embracing these solutions fast enough to prevent collapse because we ourselves are the real problem. He wants to believe that human agency, precisely *because* it has helped to create the phalanx of crises invading the barricades of contemporary life, can exercise the same power to turn the whole thing around. Ultimately he identifies human moral values, flexibility, and creativity as our last hopes for survival. But here lies a problem. The human agency that supports the excesses of industrial civilization is in service to ego.

Like Charles Mann, Richard Heinberg never seriously questions the primacy of the mind as the leader of humanity’s efforts. This makes the solutions he offers weak compared to the strength of his conviction about the difficulties. But in that context, the pessimism that he has expressed about our chances to avoid a catastrophic collapse is believable.

Does Heinberg’s lack of development of the inward aspects of radical change mean he has no relevance for the nation soul’s evolution and emergence? For a beautiful, beyond-mind future?

A more sympathetic view might be that the Shakti of terrestrial evolution is using thought leaders like Heinberg and Mann to knead and widen our thinking beyond the physical mind and even beyond the rational mind and the speculative mind. In this view Heinberg is listening through the crust of a materialist understanding from far below, and laying out in echoing details the imminent fulfillment of the case that Sri Aurobindo made in *The Life Divine* a century ago.



At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny... Man has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites... The problem is fundamental and in putting it evolutionary Nature in man is confronting herself with a critical choice which must one day be solved in the true sense if the race is to arrive or even to survive...<sup>17</sup>

Could Heinberg's "We have to change everything...and fast," be a faint foreshadowing of Sri Aurobindo's vastly more radical program?

What we propose in our Yoga is nothing less than to break up the whole formation of our past and present which makes up the ordinary material and mental man and to create a new centre of vision and a new universe of activities in ourselves which shall constitute a divine humanity or a superhuman nature... Mind has to cease to be mind and become brilliant with something beyond it. Life has to change into a thing vast and calm and intense and powerful that can no longer recognise its old blind eager narrow self of petty impulse and desire. Even the body has to submit to a mutation and be no longer the clamorous animal or the impeding clod it now is, but become instead a conscious servant and radiant instrument and living form of the spirit.<sup>18</sup>

Notice here that Sri Aurobindo identifies the breakup needed but immediately proceeds to a gleaming vision of the world beyond the breakup. Some of Heinberg's contemporaries also flip the story from crisis and disaster to opportunity in a way that neither he nor Charles Mann manage. Here is American visionary Paul Hawken on the opportunity of climate change:

The way I look at it, climate change is an offering, a gift, feedback from the atmosphere. All feedback is an instruction sheet on how an organism or system can change and transform... All systems require negative feedback in order to survive, live, grow and evolve. So negative feedback is what we want here. It is the guide to course correction...

That's what climate change is offering us—a new story about how human beings should interact with each other in this heavenly home called Earth.<sup>19</sup>

## Braiding beauty

It's one thing to summarize the understanding of thinkers like Charles Mann and Richard Heinberg, but how do you summarize beauty?

Robin Wall Kimmerer braids beauty out of many things: gratitude, graduate school, sweetgrass, science, and Skywoman. She sometimes starts her writings and talks with the creation story that is already a love story, told by both Haudenosaunee<sup>20</sup> and Anishinaabe<sup>21</sup> people in their homelands.

## Skywoman

In the beginning, there was the Skyworld, where people lived

much as they do here on Earth, raising their families, raising their gardens, walking in the forest. And in that forest grew the great Tree of Life, on which grew all kinds of fruits and berries and medicines on a single tree. One day, a great windstorm blew down the tree and opened at its base a huge hole in the ground where its roots had pulled up. Being curious like all of us, a beautiful young woman whom we call Gizhkokwe, or Skywoman, went over to have a look. She stood at the edge and looked down, but could see nothing for it was entirely dark below, so she stepped a little farther and the edge of the hole began to crumble beneath her feet. She reached out to stop herself by grabbing on to the fallen tree, but the branch broke off in her hand.<sup>22</sup>

In the watery darkness below, dark eyes noticed the bright hole in the sky and a tiny mote growing larger until they could see that it was a young woman, her long black hair trailing as she fell. In alarm, geese lifted from the surface to cushion her on their feathery wings before she hit the water. The geese couldn't hold her on their wings for long, so they called a council of all the beings of that world to decide what to do. Instinctively they understood that Skywoman needed dry land, but where to find it? The divers among them had heard that there was mud at the bottom of the water, so they sent their best swimmers down, one by one to bring some up. A great turtle floating in the middle of the council offered to let Skywoman rest on his back until the mud could be brought to the surface. Finally Muskrat was able to bring back a fist full of mud to the surface. At Turtle's invitation, Skywoman



spread the mud on his back and sang and danced in gratitude for the gift of earth and the generosity of the beings of the water world.

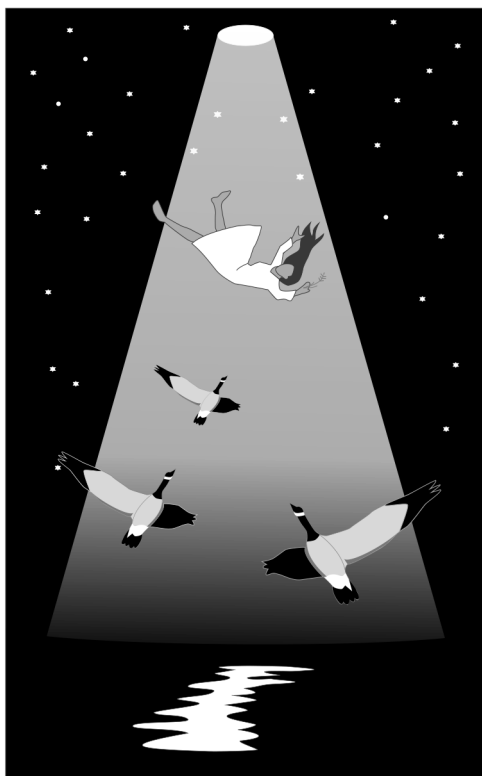
As she danced her thanks, the land grew and grew from the dab of mud on Turtle's back. And so, the earth was made. Not by one alone, but from the alchemy of the animals' gifts and human gratitude. Together they created what we know today as Turtle Island.

From the broken branch of the Tree of Life Skywoman took seeds and planted them into the new soil. All the plants and herbs of Turtle Island have grown from those gifts she brought with her.

### The wonder of giftedness

Dr. Kimmerer is Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, New York. She is also founding Director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment at that institution. A published scientist, she is a writer, a mother, and an enrolled member of the Citizen Band Potawatomi.

She once gave her third year students in General Ecology a survey that asked them to rate the positive and negative interactions between humans and nature. To nearly all of the students, humans and nature were "a bad mix." When the survey asked for examples of positive interactions between people and nature, "the median response was none"! She was stunned: How can we find a way toward ecological and cultural sustainability if the young people who select ecology for their career cannot even *imagine*



the mutual benefits of our relationship with nature? They must have been raised on a different creation story than Skywoman.<sup>23</sup>

Robin Kimmerer wants to give them and us a different way of relating to life. She is fluent and published in the abstractions of science but her home is in loving interaction with the beings and forces of Earth. Her words ring with an almost unbearable sweetness. It's easy to believe that she nearly chose poetry for her college major instead of botany. Hearing her words we savor the beauty of language, and we begin to notice how much we have lost in the lunge into the rational world of the Enlightenment.

Kimmerer anchors her teaching in the wonder of giftedness, one wedge from the vast pie of awareness. Giftedness is her given, just as it was the experience of Skywoman and the water creatures who received her when she fell. Giftedness is the acknowledgment that we receive every day, every

moment, a cascade of gifts that we have neither earned nor paid for. A world of unfathomable bounty. Truly the Garden, even today—blueberries, hummingbirds, black soil that miraculously sprouts green life, the falling rain and chattering brook, the bag of rice, the tree that became this desk, a field of daisies, the laughter of children. Trees that breathe out oxygen for our lungs.

She doesn't twist that starting point into a demonstration of her own greatness, her worthiness of gifts, or a chance to accumulate piles of stuff. Instead it lights in her a flame of gratitude and a call to relationship with the giver of gifts. The relationship is a circle—receiving and returning the gift—not a one-way street. And she is not the center of this circle. She is a player. She is at play in reciprocity, in receiving and returning the gift.

### Ownership

Dr. Kimmerer contrasts the attitude of giftedness with a different wedge of awareness, embodied in the language of her scientific colleagues, who speak of "natural resources" instead of gifts. Resources, "a stock or supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by a person or organization in order to function effectively."<sup>24</sup> Resources are property, at the disposal of the owner, an integral part of the ownership society.

She makes the contrast between gifts and owned property because contrast is how we learn with the mind. She makes the contrast explicit: "Though we live in a world made of gifts, we find ourselves harnessed to institutions and an economy that relentlessly asks, 'What more can we take from the Earth?' This worldview





of unbridled exploitation is to my mind the greatest threat to the life that surrounds us. Even our definitions of sustainability revolve around trying to find the formula to ensure that we can keep on taking, far into the future.”

She wants to offer this other slice of awareness—giftedness—to us, who live in the ownership wedge, as a new way of being, as a way that we can step back from the precipice that Charles Mann and Richard Heinberg are staring over.

### The way the world works

Bucking the tide of taking, extracting, consuming ever more, resisting the industrial language of “natural resources” as if these gifts somehow inherently belong to us, and the scientific language of “ecosystem services,” as if the gifts were somehow the inevitable outcome of a biological machine, Robin Kimmerer says that *reciprocity* is the way the world works.

She carries the story traditions of her indigenous ancestors about the covenant of reciprocity that many peoples understood for millennia: For Earth to maintain balance, every gift received requires a gift offered in return. Every creature has a gift and a responsibility. Meadow Lark has the gift of music, and her responsibility is to give voice to the song of the meadow. Salmon has the gift of travel. His responsibility is to bring back the riches of the ocean to the beings waiting inland.

In the face of accusations of anthropomorphism, Kimmerer defiantly *celebrates* the animacy of Earth and all of her creatures. Her ancestral Potawatomi language does not divide the world into human persons and things, into I and it. Instead the language grammatically upholds the animacy—the personhood—of Maple and Oak, of Raven and Swallow, of Beaver and

Coyote, of the rivers too, of mountains and stones. *Things* in our eyes become *family* in hers.

### Wilderness ethnobotany

To turn words like these from teaching stories for children of old into lived experience and memory for the young and old of today’s urbanized world, she publishes,<sup>25</sup> speaks at conferences and commencements, and takes her ecology students away from the wired and familiar world of city life for *five weeks* of ethnobotany at Cranberry Lake Biological wilderness station in upstate New York. No Walmart, no Instagram, no mobile phones, no air conditioning except the lake breeze, no electricity!

The students in this program are enthusiastic about the theory of ecology, but clueless about how to receive nature’s gifts directly, how to experience life as gift directly from nature’s hands. So the first day at camp Kimmerer and her students brainstorm a list of basic human needs and set out to discover which of them the Adirondack plants near the wilderness station might be able to give. Shelter is high on the list, so they begin to build their “classroom” from saplings of the forest and cattail leaves of the lake. Kimmerer guides them with a light touch, listening to their voices change as day by day they slip ever so gradually into ways of native life and find with their own hands and eyes the gifts of the forest and lake for food, for bedding, for antimicrobial sunburn salve, for waterproof roofing and insulation, for music and fire building. She, the teacher, has long since discovered that the land and plants themselves are the real teachers, both the gift givers and the gifts.

But she brings the human gift of storytelling, and so we get to watch through her eyes and words these

young women and men slowly calm down, settle into “the wild” as home, and send out new tendrils of connection and homecoming to the trees, the wind, the rain, the fertile muck of the lake bottom, and to one another.

### Gratitude

If reciprocity is the way of the world, what can her students give back? What can we give back to Earth for all of these gifts? Does the destruction that we are causing make us necessarily the cancer of the earth (Sir David Attenborough), exiled from the giving circle of friends and relatives?

The organizing question of daily life for her students in class and at the wilderness reserve begins to change from “what can I get?” to “what can I give?” What gifts do we humans have? What can we offer to Earth? the students want to know. Kimmerer’s Potawatomi tradition teaches that answering this question was the unique job of a human person.

When the world and its beings are gift-giving relatives, the natural response from humans, Robin Kimmerer says, our most potent gift, is *gratitude*.

Gratitude is more than a casual or formulaic thank you in indigenous traditions. Gratitude is strong medicine, she insists. It acknowledges the gift and the giver. It offers respect. Gratitude holds the gift giver in its heart. Thankfulness happily pays attention to the giver of the gift, not the taker. Paying attention, Kimmerer says, is the least we can do, and the most.

Appreciation and attention carry powerful and practical evolutionary advantages, she argues. Gratitude for the gifts surrounding us can lead to a sense of satisfaction, of “enoughness,” and thereby a natural self restraint from taking more than we need. Appreciative attention opens our eyes



to the multitude of our fellow travelers—They are everywhere. We are not alone!—to their autonomous being and to our heart’s intimacy with them. Gratitude is antibiotic to consumerism.

## Animacy

Indigenous cultures do not regard our non-human terrestrial companions as things, objects without rights or awareness, oblivious to conscious connection and gratitude.

Science, Kimmerer says, can be a language of distance, of separation, objectifying what we see and feel around us. She notices that a scientific approach to the plants around us often begins and ends in the question *what*. What tree is this? What are the characteristic qualities of that flower? And the pronouns used are likely to be neuter pronouns, like *it*. What are *its* characteristics?

She wants to ask the question *who*: Who are you?

*Who* implies recognition that the being you see is also aware and intelligent and can communicate. It has the qualities of what we call a *person*. In fact, it may be a teacher. This is animacy.

An interviewer once asked her how she, a botanist, was able to begin recovering the *traditional* plant knowledge of her tribe. Most of that knowledge had been destroyed by forced relocations of her people and by the notorious “boarding school” trauma suffered by her people and many other indigenous peoples. Between 1860 and 1978, young Indian children were forcibly taken from their families and imprisoned in institutions where they were punished for speaking their native language or practicing the life ways of their people. Generations of precious knowledge and practice were lost. Survivors of these schools could no longer pass down to their children

the cultural knowledge and traditions that had been taken from them. Kimmerer’s grandfather was one of the victims of this program.

But she replied simply to the interviewer that plants talk to her. “What knowledge the people have forgotten is remembered by the land,” she says.<sup>26</sup> We just need to listen. Asking *who* opens up a different world of communication.

Non-native plant lovers have experienced communication with plants, too; but English does not privilege this relationship. Potawatomi and many indigenous languages, however, build the knowledge of animacy into the grammar of the language.

Potawatomi does not divide the world into masculine and feminine. Nouns and verbs both are animate and inanimate. You hear a person with a word that is completely different from the one with which you hear an airplane.

Kimmerer gives the example of the word “bay,” a noun, a thing, in English; but Potawatomi recognizes the bay’s inherent animacy by making it a verb.

A bay is a noun only if water is dead. When bay is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word. But the verb *wiikegama*—to be a bay—releases the water from bondage and lets it live. “To be a bay” holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall, and there are verbs for that, too. To be a hill, to be

a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive.<sup>27</sup>

## Something missing

Something was missing in the scientific reporting of Charles Mann. The meaning of humanity that he was looking for seemed to be out there somewhere, outside of his own humanity. Richard Heinberg’s response to the *Great Unraveling* is American practicality: Let’s name and organize practical steps we need to take to change our ways and mitigate the damage of industrial and population overreach. This is what we expect from the English heritage of the United States. You want to have a practical mind and hand around when trouble is brewing. It calmly surveys the situation and breaks it down into manageable steps. It lays out all the pieces and puts them in order. But something is still missing.

Sri Aurobindo wrote brilliantly about the English mind in *The Future Poetry*: Preeminent in the practical business of life in commerce, in politics, in colonization and exploitation of the riches of the world, in mechanical science, in domination and exploitation of the world’s riches. “No spirituality, but a robust ethical turn; no innate power of the thought and the word, but a strong turn for action; no fine play of emotion or quickness of sympathy, but an abundant energy and force of will.”<sup>28</sup>

The English colonists to the United States brought with them this cultural mind, full of English determination and force of will. They built up “new England” with fierce desperation. David Hackett Fischer, author of *Albion’s Seed*,<sup>29</sup> tells how the material and family culture of each part of the early American colonies reflected so precisely and persistently the part of



England from which they came that a careful observer could see the parallel customs on both sides of the Atlantic long after the immigration ceased. My dad, for example, who was of English and Scottish ancestry, was a master worker of things with his hands, a builder and shaper of machines, boats, and houses. My mother's Irish relatives loved to see him come for a visit precisely because he would diagnose and put right the plumbing, electrical, and mechanical breakdowns they saved for his visits.

Just as something was missing in the English mind, namely the submerged but half-insistent Celtic spirit,<sup>30</sup> so something has been missing in the American mind that looks back to Europe and its "special relationship" with England. The something that is missing has actually been here much longer than the English, for thousands of years before them.

But the newcomers haven't been listening.

## The Seventh Fire

Now this indigenous mind is re-awakening all over North America. The Zapatistas of Mexico, the Idle No More movement in Canada, the Standing Rock awakening of indigenous nations in the US, the Robin Kimmerers and many other native voices across Turtle Island are conferring among themselves and have caught the attention of the nation and the world.

After centuries of oppression and disrespect, this indigenous mind is re-asserting itself. It has something to say. Now will the younger brother listen? Have they yet developed listening ears? These voices are offering to the white brother and sister a different direction: Instead of continuing with *what more we can take from the Earth*, let us ask, *what does the Earth ask of us?*

Indigenous prophecies have even predicted the situation that the world's peoples find ourselves in today. Robin Kimmerer has shared an Anishinaabe ancestral tradition, carried by their knowledge keepers, called the Seventh Fire Prophecy.<sup>31</sup>

The first six *fires*—here *fires* means the places where this people has lived and the events and teachings surrounding those places—describe the eras in the life of the people from its earliest origin. During the Sixth Fire a young man came to the people with a message about a seventh fire that would come next, a time of great changes and choices.

After the long migration of our Anishinaabe people, after the arrival of the newcomers and after all the losses—of land, of language, of sacred ways, of each other—the prophecy and history converge. It is said that the people will find themselves in a time where you can no longer fill a cup from the streams and drink, when the air is too thick to breathe and when the plants and animals will turn their faces away from us. It is said in that time, which we will know as the time of the seventh fire, that all the worlds' peoples will stand at a fork in the road. One of the paths is soft and green and spangled with dew. You could walk barefoot there. And one of the paths is black and burnt, made of cinders that would cut your feet.<sup>32</sup>

## The Eighth Fire

Kimmerer says that her people's elders tell them that they (all of us) are living in the time of the seventh fire.<sup>33</sup>

We know which path we want.

The prophecy tells us that we must make a choice between the path of materialism and greed that will destroy the earth or the spiritual path of care and compassion, of *bmaadiziwin*, of the good life. And we are told that before we can choose that soft green path we can't just walk forward. The people of the seventh fire must instead walk backwards and pick up what was left for us along the ancestors' path: the stories, the teachings, the songs, each other, our more-than-human relatives who were lost along the way—and our language. Only when we have found these once again and placed in our bundles the things that will heal us—the things that we love—can we walk forward on that green path, all the worlds' people, together...<sup>34</sup>

It is said that if the people choose the green path, then all races will go forward together to light the eighth and final fire of peace and brotherhood, forging the great nation that was foretold long ago.<sup>35</sup>

Similarities between the deep vision of Integral Yoga and indigenous teachings abound. Sri Aurobindo often wrote about the recovery of the ancient knowledge of the peoples and civilizations he had studied. He wrote, "...[T]he sadhaka of the integral yoga will not be satisfied until he has included all other names and forms of deity in his own conception... welded the truth in all teachings into the harmony of the Eternal wisdom."<sup>36</sup> He has a mighty story, an epic about a "Skywoman" who descended to the world below bringing gifts, meeting her partner, and initiating a new age. For the integral yogi, the whole manifestation is animate—alive with the





spark of the One Reality everywhere in everything. The recognition of human unity is both explicit in indigenous traditions like the Eighth Fire and implicit in the widespread teaching summarized by the phrase “all my relations.” In indigenous practice, the call to put the Divine always in front sounds familiar. The respect and humility and gratitude for all the world’s gifts are common to both traditions.

It seems to me that peoples living within the United States with gifts and teachings like these are natural carriers of the evolving soul of the nation and of the planet. Not that they should become yogis (we might honor some of them with that term) nor that we should try to become Hopi or Potawatomi; but they might help us learn to be truly native and alive to our home here.

“By whatever means,” said The Mother.

In Kent Nerburn’s *Neither Wolf nor Dog*, Lakota elder “Dan” speaks to his white traveling companion near the end of a journey of vivid memories, grief, and vision. Dan zeroes in on the relations of these two peoples in America.

I see the old ones and the children every night when I lay down... I see them at [the massacre of] Sand Creek. I see them in a hundred villages that are now forgotten... I want to know why they had to die running... I want to know why our land was cut and scarred and we were not allowed to stand against you to protect the land and the children and the old ones...

But now I am old. Different voices speak to me. And here is what they say.

They say that perhaps it is not by love, but by blood, that land

is bought. They say that perhaps my people had to die to nourish this earth with their truth. Your people did not have ears to hear. Perhaps we had to return to the earth, so that we could grow within your hearts. Perhaps we have come back and will fill the hills and valleys with our song... There may be greater truths than ours. The Creator hears and sees far over the horizon... Perhaps there is a new truth, larger even than the Lakota’s, larger than all the Indian peoples’, larger than the truths your people brought to this land, larger than all our truths combined, and that now we are coming to find it together.<sup>37</sup>

I wonder if you are beginning to hear the melody of an American yoga in these voices. There is more to come. This is the first of a series of articles highlighting American voices not found widely in mainstream media, who are expressing, knowingly or not, some aspects of the aspiration and action of the American soul.

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## Responses to "Some Voices of the American Yoga"

### The yogic discovery of a true American voice

by Wolfgang Aurose

In an integral view soul means being and becoming. Therefore the evolving part of the soul has younger and older layers. This is true for the soul of nations as well. The members of these nations are invited to play a co-evolutionary part in this dynamic. American Yoga, a term of John Robert Cornell, means to foster the evolution of the soul of the USA. This essence has an unique mission, like all other national souls.

John Robert depicts modern scientific research in ecology and biology. We hear about some sophisticated studies, undertaken with an ethical and open mindset. But something is missing. It is the missing link to the pre-Columbian past of the country. Today this past is awakening again as a rising voice, reminding to the "good life," meaning the grateful and respectful indigenous way to live on this earth. It's a old voice, but it is ad-

ressing a new audience. It is a genuine American voice.

There is the prophecy of the Seven Fires. Presently we live on the sixth fire (camp), facing devastated rivers, poisoned air, exploited land, and out-of-balance climate cycles. But there is a seventh fire to discover, which can heal these earthly wounds. However, and this is important, this fire will be manifested not by a simple renaissance of old shamanistic wisdom, but within a new way. To find this new way, this new fire, all of us are invited.

"Perhaps there is a new truth, larger even than the Lakota's, larger than all the Indian peoples', larger than the truths your people brought to this land, larger than all our truths combined, and that now we are coming to find it together." This is what the voice says. It is a vision that goes beyond the tragic and painful split of the indigenous and the later coming peoples. All of them together are needed in order to find a better and healing way into the future. This task asks for all voices of the country, and the indigenous voice is surely one of the wisest ones.

John Robert quotes Sri Aurobindo. "[T]he sadhaka of the integral yoga will not be satisfied until he has included all other names and forms of deity in his own conception... welded the truth in all teachings into the harmony of the Eternal wisdom." The Indian master has written about the steps of the collective evolution of consciousness. This finds some correspondent in a modern theory called Spiral Dynamics, which is depicting even such an evolution. Like Sri Aurobindo this view resumes that we are standing on the brink of a radical new consciousness, which will embrace the world in a completely new and fuller way. And like in Sri Aurobindo's vision Spiral Dynamics concludes that former worldviews, religions, spiritu-



alities and sciences have all had their partial truths, which will be understood, honored and integrated in the new “Integral Consciousness.”

American Yoga, and this view is the great insight of John Robert’s essay, will help to become aware of the indigenous strata of the American soul field. This is like a hidden treasure which, once it is uncovered, will allow the fulfillment of the true mission of the soul of this country. A mission which is not only done for its own sake, but, like all national soul missions, will serve as a contribution to the evolution of the whole planet.

Only this will make America great. At last and again.

## Nothing is “outside”

*by Karen Mitchell*

This is a lovely piece of writing by John Robert. He begins with a question: Where can we find threads or traces of an American Yoga? That question gives the essay a general direction. The actual experience of reading the essay is like being on a meandering river, where around each bend there is a new figure, a new voice, each one propelling us forward while adding something to the whole. There is no way I could do justice in such a brief review to everything this writing opens up, so I am going to confine myself to the first page.

At the first bend in the river, we encounter Judge Jake Ken Cloke. The American legal system, of which Judge Cloke is a member, represents the institutionalized mental consciousness. Within this system, Judge Cloke moves from an adversarial model to a more conciliatory one. This seems more ideal, but Judge Cloke observes that people who have chosen media-

tion to settle their disputes often get stuck. He comes up against the limits of a mentalized, “outer” approach. Here is where many resign themselves to helping only a few. Others might decide to return to work within the older model or start looking towards a new career—or even retirement! All of these options seem reasonable. Instead what Judge Cloke does is become “awake in the stuckness within himself....He finds that there is an energy stream or flow inside himself,” that is key to his work. When that energy flows freely, when it is unblocked, the conflicting parties he is working with are helped to move past their own stuckness. Later he realizes, “there is no us and them. There is only us.”

Here is a wonderful story about the journey from mental consciousness to conscious soul. The narrative presents this in a truly remarkable way. Judge Cloke “becomes awake in the stuckness.” The story does not say he awakes to the fact that he is stuck, or that he witnesses his “stuckness,” but that he awakens in it! The witnessing of his stuckness had probably already occurred. But like a courtroom witness, that witness is involved in the trial but is also removed. A further involvement, a more complete participation and presence is required. This involves an identification with stuckness. We cannot awake within something, unless we are all in it. What a lesson for us!

John Robert adds a beautifully worded comment after this narrative:

There is a beauty to this movement from below or outside, which starts on the surface of our awareness and our institutional knowledge then crawls and slogs across intermediary understandings until it bursts into the wideness and epiphanies of the inner

world. This movement seems to be a recognizable pattern in the playground of American Yoga.

When I ask myself is there any advantage to starting so consistently at the surface of things, so extremely outside as so many of us Americans do, I realize that there is a huge one—one that justifies the risks, the “slogs across intermediary understandings.”

It is not only that if we can manage the risks and make the slog we will “burst into the wideness and epiphanies of the inner world,” but that we will also have a depth of appreciation, a fullness of love for this Conscious Soul we would not have had otherwise. And, when we are more established in the Conscious Soul, when we can look back on our lives, we realize that even when we were at the surface of outer awareness, Conscious Soul was present. Conscious Soul embraces and has always been engaged with even the “outermost,” with the extreme “frontiers,” with things like stuckness, helplessness, frustration, desire, and depression... Nothing is “outside” Conscious-Creative-Connected Soul. So, in anything and through anything, Soul can wake to itself.

One day, perhaps, such a complete inward turning as Judge Cloke’s will be recognized as a cause for celebration. I have a sense the angels and all earth beings already celebrate it. We Americans who typically steer clear of or try to rise above “negative” experiences such as stuckness or helplessness and resist them mightily, may be the very ones called to awake within them.

And so I invite the reader to slow down while reading John Robert’s essay and give a good listen to the voices heard around each bend to get a better feel for what an American Yoga might be like and for what it has to offer which awaits you.





## The soul that played itself: 'Blind' Willie Johnson

### Chapter 1, section 1 in *The Soul That Makes Us Matter*

by Rick Lipschutz and Amanda Emerson

*Editor's note: The authors describe the life and music of 'Blind' Willie Johnson, an early twentieth century American gospel blues musician, with an emphasis on their ramifications for the nature, finding, and expression of the soul.*

"Oh deep water,  
Black, and cold like the night."

—"The Maker," a spiritual by Daniel Lanois

"His stepmother blinded him at 7 by throwing lye in his eyes after his father beat her for being with another man. He died penniless, of pneumonia, after sleeping bundled in wet newspapers in the ruins of his house that burned down. But his music just left the solar system."

—Josh Lyman, White House chief of staff on *The West Wing* television series, in an episode written by Peter Noah that aired February 1, 2004.

"I have found nobody could tell me  
What is the soul of a man."

—Blind Willie Johnson

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The night is a dark water and no one may ever know. None here who spoke seemed to know where Blind Willie Johnson was born, each place that he entered and passed through in their sequence, and the



into an obscurity where he died without a penny, sleeping on a bed of wet rags in the moldy char of his own fire gutted boarded up house, refused so much as a hospital bed, abandoned by all but Angeline.

storefronts on the sidewalks where he stood and sang those songs. Did this sightless genius of slide guitar get as far as Maine and the Mobile Bay? Who were the women that he married, or with whom he made a home? Did any bear his children? The pulpits where he preached to the children of God have crumbled, gone, or changed. There are things no traveler can tell. Where are the bones of Blind Willie Johnson? What place is that spot lying where his stone no longer stands?

Two roads meet at a gas station in the middle of nowhere.

It's hard to know how to approach Blind Willie Johnson.

All we can do is try.

He wasn't born blind, he was burned blind. No one helped him, he helped us all. We can tell so well a *one-sentence sad story* of his life. He was raised in the sands of zero that blow through the Capital of the ghetto of the sun, where everybody looked the same because he couldn't see any of them. *Poor, motherless, blinded young, he became an itinerant Texas gospel blues sidewalk performer who recorded, for Columbia Records, successful "race" records with sales upwards of fifteen thousand but who, after the Great Depression killed his recording career, sank*

'cross southern strings the blade of his knife to the clink of our pennies in his plain tin cup. Stopping on this street corner in still dark Marlin, we step the soft light years, up to The Soul That Played Itself: 'Blind' Willie Johnson.

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Alan Lomax, born in Austin, Texas, the famous field recorder and musicologist, broke down and cried when regretting that he didn't know Blind Willie was right there in Beaumont in the later thirties and the forties, and he never had the chance to meet and record him. It was the same Alan Lomax who, along with Cosmos astronomer Carl Sagan, insisted upon Willie's inclusion in vinyl grooves on the Voyager Golden Record: he has moved on, from "race" records, to being a recording representative of the human race. "Dark Was the Night" was also part of the soundtrack on *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* with Carl Sagan in 1980. Willie Johnson was born in a town called Spiritual which lies somewhere in Texas and has never been and will never be stamped on the outside of any envelope. And you're never going to be able to mail a letter with it even if the post office gets resurrected. His



story redefines what it means to be a human being.

His music is mentor to many more each month, his life now more real than ever: steel strings go sliding, in step to the vision alive in some inner eye. *Then shall a voice in the sullen wood enlighten the sighted blind.* The story changes the moment we stop being surface people. We start to see him as he is. He is one of those eternal songsters whose music travels everywhere. He's a current in the world, like the wind and the rain, or the oceans that he played on so many sidewalks far between.

The subtler shades of his awareness still shape the forms of our music, building new road miles ahead of us, still act inside us when we listen with our life. His surface, newspaper life is leaden echo to some more golden story. Which story is real? Why one or the other? Farther down the road, along comes an amalgam. Blind Willie Johnson is both, the lead and the gold.

Willie found his own ways to stay alive and no one knows what they were. His life let him know early in the morning how the Maker with His Own burning eyes expected Blind Willie to preserve it. You see. There was no shame in him taking precaution. He had to stay alive on Earth long enough to leave the solar system.

### *The sightless visionary*

Blind Willie Johnson  
lost his sight  
and found his vision.  
He wrote silences he walked on,  
he worked the streets he played,  
note to note he went sliding  
from feeling to feeling out  
a sound track for the Crucifixion.  
Willie still plays for Grace  
while being rocked to his beams  
by a gamma ray burst.

It's dangerous work.

Only can he hope his Sanctified wife  
stands on by his side while  
he holds on her dear life.

The soul that played itself  
stands with a Galilean on a Galactic  
street corner,

sliding from string to string of his

Stella guitar

the broken-off neck of a bottle.

His "Dark Was the Night,

Cold Was the Ground"

still makes the hair

of a star

stand on end.

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The world was unformed, nothing but a void and man was made out of the dust of it. God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and that man became a living soul. First thing a soul of a man must be is alive. A man being human as we all are first must live. The soul of a man is more than his life but it's not less than alive. Nephesh: the soul of life, soul of a man alive, that man became a living soul. There was no man before that and no man will come after it is no more. His music doesn't fit into form, life is too alive for that. Sometimes being human is too much music for words. Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground has no words. But the voice makes sounds no speech can utter. Sounds are too close to a man to have words sometimes. There are some things you can only say with a razor blade. Samson had his head shaved clean as his hand. Willie had his sight taken away from him. But he had his way in this wicked world with the way he slid that blade across the strings. No one else could play it the way Willie did, because. He could feel the sound of human loneliness because he was lonely as Christ Almighty when he played it.

It was the music. It started out as the music and it was always the music. Now that he is out there where no one can stop him it will always be the music. What music is, nobody knows but music alone is what brought us here. Willie made the music alone though one after the other his wives sang along with him whenever they could. Willie made music alone because there's nothing else that he wanted to do but preach. He died preaching from the bedside. He died way before he ought to have.

Why Texas? More than anywhere, Texas was the place where boundaries disappeared, dissolved, blurred. Blues married gospel, there were miracles performed with accordions and unheard of alchemy with jazz and, later, even psychedelic music hatched, near the state capital, in Austin. *The races didn't mix much but the music did.* Blind Texas Marlin, Willie once was billed. William Johnson didn't leave Texas when he died. He didn't put Texas on the map. He took it to the stars.

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There are no degrees of separation between us and Blind Willie Johnson. All of us have heard though we may not remember hearing "I Can't Keep from Cryin'," "You're Gonna Need Somebody on Your Bond," "If I Had My Way," "It's Nobody's Fault But Mine," "Jesus Make Up My Dying Bed," and "Motherless Children Have a Hard Time," at one time or another. We know this man. We have seen somewhere, in a dream, but we may not remember, this streetwise interstellar soul spaceship pioneer. The Voyager space probe sent pictures back to Earth, not only the rings of Saturn but volcanoes on moons, circling outer planets, that may harbor water filled with Life. The Voyager shows us unsuspected wonders of



the solar system. The Voyager Golden Record carries musical wonders of the Earth. We may have seen the pictures but have we heard this music? The restless wind and the rain falling down. Peruvian panpipes, Bulgarian bagpipes, Gregorian chants and Johnny B. Goode. The sound of Night chants of the Navajo and of no chance on the New York street. "The Rite of Spring" by Stravinsky and dirges of Australian aborigines. A shakuhachi flute piece and the fractal poignance of a beating heart. A Bach concerto, a Beethoven cavatina, and just a groove before the swan song of that deaf German genius, the black dove's cry of this blind American genius who made, strung, slid and moaned "Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground."

An eerie wavering, a melismatic weaving of sounds emanates from the drone, one sound merging into all sound and sliding into soundlessness, all adding depth like dimensions to the spare yet bountiful scraping of his bottleneck guitar.

*WHAT IS THE SOUL OF A MAN? Is always the question. It lives in every action that we take. When the hidden splendor of the human being—the soul—takes the stage, what plays out will be worth watching. The story each life tells will be a new one. Every performance will be the first one. Act one. Scene one. But it will not be from the soul looking out, standing in the footlights, soaking in the warmth of admiring witnesses. No. It will be from the soul looking deeper in, into its own soul, the light of its own origin: in the shining will it find the secret of the shining, in all that glows, the glory of the glowing. It is the soul that makes US matter—not just itself, all of us—because it is somewhere impossibly deep inside us all, and inconceivably far beyond all of this—or it would not be the soul.*

There are too many times we treat our own soul with the same kind of inattention the world showed Blind Willie Johnson. But (to paraphrase another Texan, Townes Van Zandt) we treated him like mud, and he ended up gold. He's out there, or in here, looking at us. There is no match for the power of simple dignity. It is our human dignity, our true status, to have no status, and by integrating all to go where beast or angel has never gone. Because of Willie Johnson, there is hope by grace, or by chase by our hounds, or Heaven's, that we can find our own soul. He's gazing down on us with those burning eyes of the Maker: *find, find, find your soul while you still alive.*

*Spirituals, that birthed the blues, that gave us gospel and sailed round that bend in the river named Jazz, take us back to Pentecost, Exodus, and Africa. The end was near: the end of the world of slavery, the end of oppression. And now death is always near, asteroids graze the spheres on the skirts of this pale blue dot whizzing by us all the time, and there is always something calling out to us. We all feel it. We're supposed—we came here—to find this little spark in the soul, this nothing that's a burning light, before we die. And once we find it, not only to become fixed in what we've found, not rigid but stabilized, but to throw everything we have, everything we are, into it like paper in fire. Let that spark be itself tonight, and it will become flame that will take old fossil ego's place. Most definitely, angels can comfort us in some afterlife, and it's true that we can find rest for awhile some place where souls find rest, but the sweet honey is here, only here: in this rock. This life, this Earth. This lumpy body.*

These hundred pounds of clay.

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Light: a halo around the head, an aura around the body, a nimbus, an aureole. The uncreated light, a consuming fire, light of the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor, the Shekinah glory, the fire that burns gold, and is the refiner and purifier of silver. In the Qur'an it is the little candle flame burning in a niche in the wall of God's temple. Our humble body in the form of a body of glory, that is the being the soul is becoming. "That little spark in the soul." To get there, the wordless moaning of Dark Was the Night, pure surrender: it is not wallowing in self-pity, it is surrender, to take your *stand alone at the end of everything. Now I live on the verge of tears. This is just the beginning. One day I will stand alone at the end of everything.* This leads to a wooden cross bursting into a rose of light.

This poem was written by a man named Richard Power. There are things, Power wrote, that "only a man on fire" can know. Like Shiva. Like Jesus. The courage to jump into it.

Like snake handlers: they seem to feel if they swallow the poison in the right way that they may be visited by special powers.

Like shamans, who *do not cast spells, they break them.*

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*His voice.* It was only an instrument. It has a haunting familiarity. It grounds us and it carries us away with its otherworldly grit. Willie's was a broken voice, with overtones, from the West African griot, the Central Asian shaman, throat singing. He may have learned it from the Reverend "Blind" Madkin Butler. Though it spoke for





all, this voice was one person burning through. It had no whispering syncopation but percussion, polyrhythmicity, it slid through off-notes, while strings in tongues and tongues unstrung made sidewalk under foot slip away.

Could this voice be from the soul? I hear you ask. Soul is pure, ethereal, monotonously azure: not broken voice but whole-singing would seem to be soul singing. And yes, he also possessed a soft, sweet tender tenor voice in which one can feel the mother's love that had been taken from him when he was still a baby. But the griot sound, as possessed Blind Willie, at once embodied and ensouled, anointed by the Holy Ghost, was a wild orchestra of power. The sun in it mingles with the Earth. Can you praise God with the devil's own voice?

No, you can't but he did just that. And when done with the skill Blind Willie Johnson displayed, it deserves to be judged as genius. In speaking of his voice, we are talking about timbre, the power of one sound full of bark from the tree hidden inside it, falling and shouting, rising again to a whisper. The whole human past lives in that voice.

The melisma of Muslim prayer chant, Sufi singing from scattered pieces of the world, the *davening* or back-and-forth rocking of white-haired children of Israel at a Saturday morning service. The power of what Federico Garcia Lorca called *duende*, defined by Goethe as "a mysterious power that everyone feels and no philosopher is able to explain."

There are harmonies designed to reconstruct the world in those dissonances, solace in those structures of disquiet. And real, living sacred animals that are an ancient unshakable bridge to the beyond. It carried in it



both the darkness and light of our common origin. A whole voice includes brokenness and is the bigger for it, for it brings to bear all the roughness of reality.

It was the voice that was needed to make "The Soul of a Man," what it needed to sound like, to sound like it rose from the soles of the feet and came from the belly, from the beat of the heart and the inside of the throat of a human being.

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Blind Willie Johnson in asking, again and again, "What is the soul of a man?" and in traveling his world in search of an answer, comes upon someone whom he hears "teachin' the lawyers and the doctors" that "a man ain't nothin' but his mind." And, if we were pressed, most of us might agree, or argue, that it is our mind that makes us a human being. Without our mind, we would not be human. So we think. Of course, we can't be human without our mind, right? But, somehow, true loneliness seems closer to being human than having a mind is! Standing in that hard rain, Bob Dylan "heard the sound of one person who cried he was human." It's not like that loneliness is the soul in itself, but until we have felt such loneliness, we likely won't find

the soul. We may never meet up with ourselves. We may never know who we are not by idea, but by identity.

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What are the powers that lie beyond us and that move us?

Darkness pitted in darkness, we come out of that.

The little spark in the soul is planted there.

*The soul is born where the gods refuse to dwell.*

Only lives there the Ardor of the Flame.

We came out of the littlest spark though its portion is always there Above.

And when the two rays rejoin then the being that they are together will grow stronger, more luminous, more powerful.

The soul will burn like a pair of zithers through this poor Zulu mask.

The mind will be but a movement of that radiance, a structure of that shining.

Our emotional nature be effulgent with that burning essence far beyond any reach of feeling.

Our heart will be held and beat only in that harmony, standing happier than heaven in that supramental surf and more human in its being the more it ceases to be in its muscle.

The energetic power station will be a portion of the sun's energy and we will find a less grave way to breathe.



This will we be, no longer narrow of breath and brain.

There may be no ending to this process, but there is a time that has no time for time.

It is something like the hands of hyperspace holding us until we are its stuff and substance.

We are those hands and hold all that they do and we have always that hypersilence that is the presence inside that Space.

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That is what Blind Willie Johnson born in Temple, Texas came to teach us, not with words, but to preach pulling no strings but sliding across them with the neck of a bottle, a pocket knife, or even a ring that he wore over a bone.

Christ who taught the world the Temple, and Willie brought to the world in Temple, were married.

Willie wrote:

“Since Jesus and me got married,  
haven’t been a minute apart,  
receiver in my hand,  
and religion in my heart.”

*He will ring sweet and easy  
When you lost you will find  
People always so busy  
Jesus always has time.*

I wrote that.

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Blind Willie Johnson not only sang about the soul or asked where it is and what it is. *He lived from the soul*, and he knew.

Willie burned and shone with

such conviction; it moved, it motivated him to develop his string work and his sliding to such a significant degree. He danced his way through the genres of his generation. He integrated them in a way that led not only to their further development, but to their joining each other. They become something greater than any genre can be in its separation, isolation, total segregation. He boldly appropriated the beat of Satan and then tore into it with divine abandon to bring more sinners to the Lord. He was moved in the melodies that wove through his songs the beauty of the gospel and the sanctity of the Spirit that moved on the face of the waters.

What the soul is like. What its character is. How Willie Johnson did exemplify a soul life and the soulful, for a living.

*It brings joy without just cause, joy for no reason.* Willie had that and it even is present in the abandon and the growl in his voice. It is not a sad gruff bleak thing that he brings forth. It is the joy of one who has given up all and been given all: the soul, the spirit that has joy and needs no reason and no excuse to be exalted and to raise others into the radiance that he sees the better for being blind.

*It is love without thought of anything being given in return.* He sang his songs, from street corner to street corner and felt happy only to share what he had with everybody who passed by no matter who they were or what their situation. He didn’t need to know, he only needed that love to flow forth from his being out into the streets of East Central Texas into the hearts of those whom he wanted to kindle with the burning light of the Lord whom he served.

*The soul is gratitude and compassion* and Blind Willie Johnson was gratitude and compassion in a body on the streets, burning only to bring others

into the space where he lived, the Space where now he lives on the Voyager Golden Record. But it is still the same golden space of compassion that is the substance and gratitude that is the very stuff of the soul of such a person.

*The soul gives courage to endure any hardship.* Willie learned to play, or he kept playing and learned to play better, after he had been blinded, as the story goes, by the lye that got thrown in his face by a stepmother who’d been caught cheating and beaten by his father. Whatever it was, he endured. He endured the treatment meted out in the segregated society, the mere pitance, dimes and pennies tossed into his tin cup, the end of his recorded career by the cold hand of the Depression so that the members of his race, now even poorer, simply could not afford to buy the “race records.” But he endured, he rose above, he played. He moved to Beaumont in the last part of his life and he played there, on the street, in the church, and perhaps at Baptist meetings in Houston. I didn’t know Blind Willie, but I feel that I do. I feel that he endured these things and took them on for the sake of Christ, and to paraphrase another Southerner, William Faulkner of Mississippi, Willie will not merely endure, he will prevail. His songs influence so many, bluesmen and women, gospel greats, even the shouts of heavy metal and pure burning rock. Ry Cooder, Clapton, Jack White rave on Blind Willie’s gospel slide genius. No bluesman or gospeller has ever written a piece like *Dark Was the Night*, though it seems to have been based on a template of wordless songs of the Crucifixion found in some Baptist churches in his East Texas. One is a poem of the night before the Crucifixion. A song about Gethesemane, the garden where the Lord still goes walking in anguish—alone, no one can stay up with him



even for an hour. He stops in his agony to pray. The sweat down his face is blood. Drops of it still running, like a river on that ground.

*There is a beauty in his soul formed of the nature of nobility and the substance of integrity greater even than Pico della Mirandola's Oration on the Dignity of Man: it is sweet, it never cloy, one never tires of it. It comes through in the songs and the way he sings them, and the subtle interplay between his guitar and his voice like a church and its congregation. There is nothing more beautiful than to feel this through his songs.*

And in some of his songs, again, *there is that sweetness, that connection with all of human life and unknown others: we feel it again in Dark Was the Night and it is felt now moving through space and it is reaching that Oneness that is real because it is versatile and it is ringing everywhere and it will never stop.*

The light of our origin. The same light that is in us all. It wants to come forward, it wants to burn, because it is a burning light. It wants nothing but to burn and for the world to be whole, for the whole world to be nothing but a burning light. But, because it is a light of love and not impetuous, it wants to burn it down without setting the place on fire.

Like Tipitina's on a good night.

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My life story is the story of Dead Man's Point. The point is I can't find my poem right now so here was the story. The Coast Guard put up this faded warning sign: *Dead Mans Point. Please keep back. People have fallen to their death here.* It was April, I wanted to touch the ice plant, the blooming ice plant. Green spears and succulent pinks and yellow suns, out past this

narrow thread of ridge, on a little spur over the Golden Gate—that mile wide strait of icy water between the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay. I made it finally 'cross that ridge so narrow death was staring me in the face. I felt a joy that has never left me, sharing in the life of the planet. I don't accept any of these "Here Be Dragons" and this is the place I step beyond the warning sign. If it weren't for the ice plant the cliff would slide off. Now I'm close enough to see the little droplets of stuff that make them sparkle like ice. I only want to share with you a few words to continue this conversation the world is having about Blind Willie Johnson in the space where we live.

*All this is there in five words that live in some speech beyond words, that the whole world which he has left billions of miles behind, is talking about: Nothing but a burning light.*

Like the West African griots, whose voicing and modalities and soundings influenced him so deeply, Blind Willie was itinerant and his fortunes and celebrity could fall considerably and rise again, between one street and another street between two oceans, along the rivers and the track of his restless travels through time. In griots reposed the history of a region.

Yet the deepest part of his soul was always at rest. Could power equal repose times the square of the speed of the light of lights? In Blind Willie Johnson, *reposed* the history of the region of the whole human past. His song reaches back, way back. For here the sightless visionary looks into the nature of the powers that lie beyond us, and move us. We can feel them move us through the primal force of his song. He sings us back home, somewhere in the human past.

Before Palestine and India, before

Babylon and Mongolia. What were we? Who are we? We come from a place deeper than mantra or Kabbalah, older than Central Asia and the spirituality that preexisted what we know as past.

We are all Africa. The sun. Nothing but a burning light.

Like the uncanny keen of Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground, there is something about these five words, Nothing but a burning light, that is old as the world. Older than that. He *un*-earths an ancient common spiritual language, that basis that belongs to us because we were born from a human womb. The soundings in the song "Soul of a Man," its gentle honest insistence, the guttural gravel and its softer accompaniment, work together to take away our history, our education, our social and financial status, like so much drapery that covers up something that is beyond invention and artifice.

Burning light—we become a sun, not a wandering rock, a sun, fusion furnace, couple that with wisdom and what do we have? Power to raise the dead. Soul full fledged has scope to fly, where wings that light those dead shall rise. Think on that. When there's nothing but a burning light.

This starts with almost a speck of nothing in a ravaging sea of darkness wrapped in darkness. It is not only a light, an essence that never changes, always the same, a radiance but also a developing fire.

On the one hand we see "a shaft of light cut into the darkness." The protest in his voice disrobes us. Like Bessie Smith, like Son House had a voice, Blind Willie Johnson had a voice. The presence we may feel, the power that emanates to form us—that light burns the residue away to reveal what is in us irreducible. We do not concede to





dead men their point. We feel stripped down to the divine spark.

Anything in the Bible that speaks of the divine spark? *Gen. 2:7* “*The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*” This is very much blowing into us a divine spark: we are formed of dust of the ground, stardust of the universe, such a unique synthesis of elements of exploding stars, and into these elements is breathed something divine, the breath of life, the divine spark: a parable for the way the soul enters into a human body at birth. This is not an undivine or animal soul, it is the divine soul clothed in human form.

*His voice is a form of protest disrobing, it strips us down to the divine spark.*

But we don’t ever seem to find it, not until all the rest is gone.

There is no black soul, no Jewish soul, no European soul, no South Asian soul. Only sacred human essence. We are all stripped down to the divine spark. No owner’s manual to the soul because it is our own soul that owns us and we are its hands. Going deeper, what is the soul?

It is what is but it grows, that hazy speck becomes a heaven spark, a gleam, a growing flame, a spreading fire, it climbs through all the burning grades of light till at last, there really is nothing but a burning light, light, endless light, with no darkness at all.

While it is growing, and it has so much growing to do, we inhabit it, slowly settle into the light, we have a light to go by, finally, a guide, and that is enough to show us the next step we have to take.

*The whole earth will be nothing but*

*a burning light. And life will be more interesting than ever. One of those million year old mantras. It means more than what Blind Willie Johnson consciously put into it because it came into him from somewhere else. It was speaking in tongues, words that spoke more than words can speak. We’ve all got the Holy Ghost fire whether we like it or not. It’s up to us to take what comes to hand and spark it up.*

It’s an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that cuts through language. On radiant tongues of flame, the Spirit pours into us—or pours out from its own dwelling in the deepest place within us—and touches the soul, the only part of us that is like itself, and kindles it so the spark starts to glow into a fire. *We come to a permanent start and we will never again be merely that glimmer that we were. “Nothing but a burning light”* though it will always remain mysterious does *somehow utter what can not be given speech, and hearkens to the reality of the Pentecost within us and in that actual (living) room, after the death and resurrection of Christ, when the disciples, women and men, gathered and became new in tongue and torches of the Spirit’s flame (Acts of the Apostles: 2:16-21).*

Isn’t it just a burning lamp and a guide to our perplexity? It’s a lamp that can become a greater light, a candle that can become a sun. It may be a long process to be that plenitude. *It starts out small so it can have, and give to the other parts of us, its whirling spiral joyful progression, of growth that may be eternal: fire, after all, only burns upward. So it is both intense questioning and an answer that is not final but reveals—if it’s an honest answer—a further question. Not a blind truth but truth that blazes, to blaze a pioneer path.*

The Holiness and Pentecostal people were populist. Their forceful

sort of sacred populism was fearless to share the most personal experience possible to the human being: intimacy with the indwelling Holy Spirit, embracing and kissed by the soul in tongues of fire. And way before their time, Sanctified women held power in the congregation. Although the sacred feminine was not notable in the lyrics, it comes through in the singing and the playing. You can hear, not only what sounds like the ferocity in Blind Willie Johnson’s voice, but the ministrations, of a tender mother. It suffers with you in the darkness, it heals and solaces you, and it can draw you out of your most difficult time. Yet he can also be confrontational: it’s as if your own intimate soul has come forward from the shadows, it knows you by identity—“I was a gambler, just like you”—it insists that you change. It puts a pressure on you, drops of a radiance that you can’t rightly resist, to be peaceful, and bright, strong, and joyful, just as it is, surrendered to the light of its own origin which is the same as yours. You don’t have a soul, you *are* soul, and your body, your mind, your money and your life are instruments that it is able to orchestrate by some miracle of jazz so the whole composition moves like a wave but every single part of a note’s given just the right touch. We’ve all been there, we’ve all felt harmony, but the soul when it takes that baton for good, knows how to make the band a band, and syncopates new arrangements that we can play fully keeping it harmonious for this whole human hour. But when the soul steps out front and center, there is an urgency, and you hear some of that in Willie’s voice. His name wasn’t “Willie” for nothing: it’s “will you” or “won’t you,” with him.

*The devil doesn’t own the music spirit, it’s supposed to be the other guy*



that does that. Their path was never easy: resistance from the mainstream church took the form of torching tents where revivals were held. Sister Rosetta Tharpe once shouted, *There's something about the gospel blues that's so deep the world can't stand it.* The shiver in the rock had a queer godmother. The Church of God in Christ supported Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Sister Arizona Dranes, and it channeled the fire within the young blind man from Marlin and provided him with a forum and a foundation and he sang with his tongue on fire. Sister Arizona Dranes was "a blind lady" who sometimes "let the spirit overtake her...jumped up from the piano bench when it hit her." But she was classically trained, both in voice and piano, at The Institute for Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Colored Youths in Austin, the capital of Texas, for 14 years, until she was 23 (1896-1910): she could sing a Verdi aria and play a Beethoven sonata. She became Pentecostal later in life and Arizona did for the gospel beat piano what Willie Johnson did for gospel bottleneck slide guitar (Michael Corcoran, "He Is My Story: The Sanctified Soul of Arizona Dranes"). She pounded the mystery out of a piano like a true barrelhouse missionary.

Verse 4 of Psalm 150 tells us: "Praise Him with stringed instruments." Blind Willie Johnson took that to heart.

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**EARLY YEARS:** He was blind and black so he could choose a path from two careers, to beg or to sing. He already made himself a cigar box guitar

back when he was five years old and still could see. It was a street world in those days. So a tin can was wired to an old guitar and the little boy started busking out on street corners. Back then, a century ago in the 1910s, Marlin, a railroad junction in east-central Texas, bustled with churches, brick works, cotton gins, the steam laundry, the cotton compress, the mill to plane lumber, the plant to vulcanize rubber, and maybe a dozen more churches. There were mineral wells and big hotels. Roads had gravel and when it didn't rain too hard they drained. Still Marlin had less than five thousand souls. The street musicians were conventional gospel choirs. Where

*You can hear, not only what sounds like the ferocity in Blind Willie Johnson's voice, but the ministrations, of a tender mother. It suffers with you in the darkness, it heals and solaces you, and it can draw you out of your most difficult time.*

did this blind man come from with his bottleneck slide that no one today can replicate, when Texas guitarists didn't play the slide? Did he teach it to himself, or learn rudiments from a traveling bluesman when some train moaned through from Mississippi, and then improvise the rest on his own to a place no apprenticeship could take him to, because he set a higher standard for himself? It seems that in the Church of God in Christ on Commerce Street, they encouraged music of praise that electrified the air with an energy that had peace at its center.

Five-year-old Willie said, "I want to be a beecher." His first guitar was a homemade construction, out of the body of that cigar box. It may have been a one-string affair, like an African diddly-bow; playing it, the preacher-to-be may have practiced the possibilities in a single note, in all its nuance and the bent places in between.

Blinded at 7 or so, he already knew how to play, and all over sidewalks the American South stopped to appreciate, penny by penny, the many black blues songsters who bore the name of Blind. He played the Texas winter wind that might get wild, cold and hard, young fingers turning stiff. He made slide sound fitter than a fiddle. He could syncopate and make a single note vibrate and live forever in the space between spaces. In Texas a man can string himself out over a lot of space, and he learned how to do that in a way no one else ever has. He didn't play or sing like anybody.

Some songs he took, some he made himself, but wherever he got them, he defined them: those who came after tended to base their renditions on his template. Later

in the nineteen twenties he played on the sidewalks of nearby Hearne, another east Texas cotton town, with nine brickyards, 36 miles from Marlin. Blind Willie Johnson had his corner and Blind Lemon Jefferson had another, just down the street. Jefferson's attempts at slide guitar were no match for Willie's, but then nobody has ever played a six-string like Blind Lemon Jefferson and no man with seeing eyes has been so downright an observer of human nature.

But Blind Willie didn't let the devil steal the beat from him like so many bluesmen did; no, he played for God. He went to a church named after God. God, who doesn't ever change. God, who moves on the waters, and speaks from a whirlwind.

Adam Booker was a blind pastor in Hearne. He remembered that in 1925 Willie still lived in Marlin, but his father lived in Hearne where he



worked in a brickyard. Almost every Saturday, Willie would visit his father and in the afternoon, play his songs on the sidewalk. Cotton farmers would toss money into the tin cup Willie had wired to the neck of his guitar. They were there to do Saturday shopping and to socialize. Pastor Booker remembers that sometimes Blind Lemon Jefferson would sing “See That My Grave Is Kept Clean.” The rasping ferocity in Willie’s voice would make sure the cotton farmers and their families could hear him above the competition and the street noise. Many of the people who remembered Willie in Beaumont, Texas—the place where he lived out his last decade and died after the fire that burned his house down—were blind, also. When asked if they still remembered the blind gospel singer, they would ask, “Which one?” In those years and that place, the streets were full of them.

He could draw four distinct sounds just by striking a single string. Some claim to hear five. On further penetration it appears that starting with just one string he could educe an even dozen discrete sounds.

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Midnight one of his songs slips into your room he can *make your floorboards fret*.

Southern ladies wearing summer cotton dresses wafting through the wisteria, and looming the other side of owners in fine fettle, it was your future before it was their past. It was your forest, the magnificent lungs of the Earth, before it was their cotton. If you were indigenous, your day was over: your tears on the trail to elimination from the population would help keep the cotton available and cheap. Fingers fell timber when the timber fell down. The specks of dirty cotton lint in the

air could give you byssinosis, which is abysmal as it gets—it’s a bad business, Brown Lung Disease. Eating and living and breathing and losing your hearing from your job.

Especially in the carding rooms the air was thick with cotton fluff. So dusty unless you were close up you couldn’t see each other. The stuff would clog up your eyes and get into your throat. Air so humid you had to wear your lightest cotton overalls. You’d close your eyes and might see those Southern ladies, or you might see your own wife and children, your old grandpa, in the field picking the cotton, bent over, with a sack—tearing up their hands. Better open your eyes quick. Inside there moving with the machine they call the mule you better see sharp. You better work barefoot, then you don’t have shoe laces flapping and getting tangled—you can feel with your feet, without the false protection of shoe leather. But if you slipped over the top of the mule in you went and maybe part of you didn’t come out. The monster cotton mules went crashing back and forth and could crush your lucky old ten-fingered existence.

*To survive the naked light, the spinning traps, those cunningly flammable cotton fibers, friction of the perpetually in motion machinery whose metal teeth can tear you apart easy as a cotton sheet—to do The Man’s work, quicker than a chicken, harder than a martyr, and bigger than Texas, you’d need a head on your shoulders and fire in your feet.*

*If he’d been through those mills, been fiber of that fiber and metal of that flesh, the dirty specks of cotton lint would have dusted his lungs, too—If he hadn’t been blinded and spirited to the streets, cafes, sidewalks, churches, would the miracle of his music now been spinning through space?*

*His physical presence.* The soul of the Earth is ground inside his voice, rough as the trees and brush of Central Texas. Then a soft tenor will steal in, like the cotton clothing sewn from the crop in that lonely dust-rich country. Never have gravel and silk conversed with such eloquence. He is tall and dark and intense. Perhaps he draws intensity from the seven devils that never stop burning in both his eyes. He wears a short haircut and a smart grey suit. He keeps his mustache neat and pencil thin. In his only known photo, he sits at a piano, holding his guitar, which is a Stella—they made them in Jersey City, New Jersey—with a tin cup wired to its headstock. He wears that suit and a tie. He always carries himself with dignity. The same grace that separates him from the world of the blues and the cotton mills also holds it in his slight powerful arms. This African lion can coax notes out of strings like the strings that vibrate our universe can’t make, and feelings out of you and me that should never be given speech.

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## **Why The Big Easy Put Willie Johnson in the Stir**

The New Orleans police nearly arrested him in 1929. No, they don’t nearly do anything in New Orleans, they do it. So they probably *did* arrest him. They were fully justified to do so for the simple reason that there can be no false arrest in New Orleans. The law down there is ancient: Napoleonic code. It is perfectly legal to arrest anybody for anything in New Orleans. Therefore, you can be thrown in jail for walking with intent to stumble, for impersonating a human being, and for molesting a cheeseburger. And Blind Willie was guilty of all three!





He had just wolfed down a temporary appeasement of his human being because the holy blues makes you very, very hungry. He was as usual impersonating himself: a blind itinerant gospel sidewalk musician who also happened to be black. (We all know, by now, that he was the soul that played itself.) And he was walking with intent, stumbling away from the hotel where he had just recorded two songs during his third recording session for Columbia Records. It was the second week in December and the sessions were December 10th and 11th at Werlein's, a music store in the Quarter.

He may have been walking with Elder Dave Ross, who accompanied him to New Orleans. He stopped on the cold sidewalk, to capture a few tips from passersby in the tin cup that was always wired to the headboard of his Silvertone guitar from Sears, or a Stella if he were lucky, and started to strum with even more than his usual abandon and shouting a composition of his own, right there in front of the New Orleans Customs House. Voice a lion's roar, Lion of Judah, his hands made music that's propulsive, so percussive, you were sure he had a drummer with him but he didn't. He was making a racket fit to rival any rock and roll band from thirty years in the future! No metal sound is heavy enough to match him for intensity. No remedy for the raving rattler. You'd need a new kind of supernova to make metal heavy enough so it could strike an equal match. Willie was burning on his feet, blazing in his tent, to stumble on the side of the Grace that even breaks the Sabbath of God to feed a human hunger. New Orleans was poor, dispossessed, and

it was hungry for justice. It was 1929 for God's sake! So Willie was walking with his fingers and his strings with intent to stumble and to slide into some higher form of music, to fight that ancient oppression, in any way he could. "If I Had My Way I'd Tear This Building Down" acts out the Bible drama of Samson and Delilah. When Willie sang it, he *was* blind Samson: a force came out of him that might cast stone pillars down. To New Orleans' finest, it just could have sounded a mite uncomfortable. This wasn't one of those Hebrews in the Bible. History was now! Willie was pounding gospel truth where customs and those New Orleans rising-sun houses would prefer a few damned lies instead. Perhaps

*The soul of the Earth is ground inside his voice, rough as the trees and brush of Central Texas. Then a soft tenor will steal in, like the cotton clothing sewn from the crop in that lonely dust-rich country. Never have gravel and silk conversed with such eloquence.*

not having properly contextualized the content of the lyrical material, the officer was about to handcuff Blind Willie. The charge: attempting to incite to riot. Willie came a hair's breadth away from what befell Samson—having "his head shaved, clean as his hand." He stayed just shy of jailhouse scalp.

Miraculously, he retained his tone, sure, the Customs House was not torn down by an angry mob (no utter fantasy if you factor in the U.S. economic crash), and liberty was not lost. For "God Moves on the Waters"—or He did that day. And because grace stayed the hand of the arresting Philistine, Willie was free to show up for the next day's session, and so we have a few more precious minutes—as we have, in all, only an hour and a half, nothing more—of his immortal recorded music. "God Don't Never Change" will still

be in rotation when the services of the houses of the rising sun are no longer required because the sun is up for good. Further research by The Grains of Rice has come to reveal that Blind Willie Johnson was arrested after all. For being too arresting a presence so that people stopped on the street and realized how depressing their situation was in this wicked world, where the Philistines sat eating the best damned lunch anywhere in Antoine's and the Court of the Two Sisters and they, the people, like that Customs House building, were only there to hold up the weight of the world.

*Rock and roll stole the soul of Pentecost from a Sanctified church in East Texas. How come there's no Texas historical marker for that? It's fine white kids gyrate to Elvis and rock it with poor Janis and the rolling millionaires, but when folks move with the Holy Ghost in a church named after God we heartily ridicule those people as holy rollers.*

The three dark days between the Crucifixion and Resurrection: all the soul can do is wait. Something uncanny in the wordless moan, the Ah, well, something unearthly that is unearthed in this suffering, that God is suffering with us, in the dark night on the cold ground, deeper in His way than we do in ours. It is stronger for being unstated. So the two pieces are related, the darkness after the Crucifixion is a kind of womb. It's austere as any Aeschylus play, blindness the soul of the plot, voices of steel to vibrate with the voice of every lonely being, it suffers with you in an eternal present: in a Sanctified church, this is the sound the



Sisters in the Amen corner make, to spirit some silence inside every praying word. Or, in other language, it is the space of the immaculate conception. Without this experience, perhaps Jesus could not raise a body from the grave. It seems safe to say—He told me this on a Greyhound bus—he had gone through every experience a human being can have. Was the Prodigal Son parable His Own experience? Can I get a witness? This song is witness, not to our compassion for Christ crucified to a tree, but the compassion of Christ for us when our hands are nailed and our feet are tied and we enter a different rhythm, we can't even move. Absent the darkness, three days of darkness we cannot find the light. Three days of darkness precede a crescent moon.

Wayne E. Bloomquist of Sparks, Nevada, writes: "In mid-December, I suddenly came down with a fever... I perspired profusely for three days... My bedroom was...a sweat lodge.... The third day...in the middle of the afternoon...an intense light suddenly filled my being....I had the sensation...I had *become* the light....I heard the words in my head, 'Mother, I never knew I loved you so much.' I...started to sob...the sweetest tears imaginable....I felt fine now...no fever or weakness....With that experience, my life took a 180-degree turn." Wayne told me he entered a kind of hyperspace: he is still in it, he has never come out of it. "Why would I ever want to?" Sparks, Nevada, is burning with a fire that neither consumes nor mars the flesh. This Light is not some subtle and tenuous substance, it is solid luminous & powerful. You can't ball the jack into it because it's more solid than matter in a very different way. With unimposing conviction, no particular emphasis, Wayne tells me this burning light has become the bedrock of his life.

And he saw it in the face of an Indian woman in a tent on the beach at night. Not in America. He was walking the Beach Road in Pondicherry, an ancient city on the southeastern coast of India, where he and his traveling companion for this life were recharging on a spiritual pilgrimage. Sometime between 7 and 8 in the evening, he slowed his pace as he walked past that tent along the Bay of Bengal. It was large and all lit up inside by some kind of portable lamps that seemed to be swinging back and forth. He customarily walked along the Coromandel Coast coming back by the same route most every evening. His wife took the walk with him, he said, but not tonight; she had stayed at the hotel after dinner, because she wanted to read. "I saw it on the way, and it was still going on when I got back. So I walked in. It had to be some kind of Christian revival: all South Indians; I was the only white person in there. I walked to the front and sat down. Most everybody else was also sitting. But there was a woman standing up, over to the side a little, with her palms outstretched, in a reverie. She was in ecstasy, her eyes just rolled back. Was the crowd looking at her? No, I was: just me. It wasn't a performance, it was not a cameo, and she wasn't in the aisle—she was just one of the worshippers. I couldn't take my eyes off her. I've never seen that look on a person's face before. See, I grew up in the Midwest, white Protestants, and church meant scripture, a long sermon, long faces, and the businesslike singing of hymns. But this woman! She was feeling it. The look on her face was beautiful. She wasn't just into it: she was *inside* it, and it was in her. I've got that same feeling, back in the States, from African Americans. I don't think they're less intelligent than we are, or *as* intelligent; I think they're more intelligent. And the spiritual connection possibly from

all the suffering gives them emotional wisdom. What they've seen comes out in their singing. It touches things that only come from being there. They mostly don't have to be taught, like we do, to go deep within: some of them are there already. I think the strength of this country is from the blacks." He walked back to the guest house on the Beach Road where his wife was waiting for him. Nolini Kanta Gupta had given her the name "Surama," which, he said, means "a most pleasing person." Surama (Jacqueline) Bloomquist was maybe reading *Richard the Third*, or a long Russian novel. The day after my wife died, very much alone, I found a letter in our mailbox for Lucie, a long note Jackie had sent from Sparks, Nevada, full of the cheer of her spunky life, in curling letters longhand.

The hands of the crucified body touch the depths of all loneliness, the arms of the glorified body reach toward the heights of all longing. The soul is fire, the soul is a burning light, the soul is also bliss. Delight. In near death experiences, people who pass through a tunnel of light, or cross a bridge of light into light, feel a deep peace and also a warm and intense bliss. They feel wrapped inside an incredible embrace. They report feeling a love so powerful they don't want to leave it and come back through the protected passages to their lives in this world. We don't have to die to experience that extreme bliss! It is the bliss of the soul right behind the heart, or inside the heart of the head, and the deeper we go into that burning light—or into the sound that cannot be struck on any instrument—the stronger and more intense this bliss becomes. It brings with it such solace. And it must be some very great ecstasy indeed that could make all the suffering of all that lives worthwhile. Not just dark pleasures without some deeper purpose,



it's joy alone that justifies the agony of this journey. Some unendurable bliss that we will blissfully endure. A joy that permeates every part, every cell. Deeper than life, stronger than death is Ananda. The singing world that rolls off every human tongue.

*The soul when its light is made fully manifest has the power, force, and energy to resurrect the dead.* "When Christ stepped in at the Temple, the people all stood amazed. He was teaching the lawyers and the doctors how to raise a man from the grave." That's what can be done by the soul that makes us matter. That's what he's saying. *The soul when its light is made fully manifest, has, hell it IS the power, force, and energy to raise the dead. That burning light can burn through everything, can burn down death itself and bring us back to life in a body that can never be destroyed.* From another Texas country singer named Lyle: "I will rise up though I be as a dead man."

Religious language distorts more than it reports. It conceals more than it reveals. So I'll try to put it in simple, human terms. God must be in us in order to win us. There has to be something in us, however rudimentary, that's already divine, if we are to be attracted and respond: like meeting like, soul come home to soul. And if we are to be nothing but a burning light, we need two things, a faculty for one and for seconds, a bulb.

We need a faculty. For instance, thinking is a faculty housed in our brain. So if someone tells us to "think about" something, we know how to do it. We need to find or develop the faculty to put us in direct contact with our soul, and to express the direct power of the soul in matter.

And to do this, radiate that burning light in this world, we need a bulb. The effulgent core of embodied being concentrates, becomes concentrated especially in that bulb. A bulb to house—that is, a body to hold—that light. Not a brain as we know it—but a light source not to tell, but show us that we have a soul. And to put our body in touch with it. The ethers have to mingle with the earth and matter.

Is there a parallel between what a light bulb does—radiate that burning light to this world—and a plant bulb? Possibly, because the energy of both comes from the same place: the sun. The plant bulb has stored energy of

yoga. We lack the understanding to photosynthesize, that blind dark longing trust. Not perceptive enough for the light to plant itself in us, we follow the law of our being by opposing it.

*The goal is, or would seem to be, that not our essence alone, but our expression also be nothing but a burning light.*

Our soul, which burns to shine away the darkness, is stunted without a body. So, to be no thing but a burning light, you need: a) the faculty, "unspun but spinning all that is whirled." Sun, or soliterraneous, consciousness. b) a bulb. A human body, current or

better or *more minimalistic* model, perhaps where organs are simplified energy centers with a simpler but still very present

*The hands of the crucified body touch the depths of all loneliness, the arms of the glorified body reach toward the heights of all longing. The soul is fire, the soul is a burning light, the soul is also bliss. Delight.*

the light that leaves have photosynthesized from previous years. The bulb is not only the dormant stage of a plant, the storage organ for its starches and sugars, its minerals and moisture—it is the life that surrounds the living shoot of the plant. As the plant comes out of dry dark dormancy, it sprouts, sends out shoots, it leafs out and flowers—puts forth all that we recognize as plant—up out of the Earth, to photosynthesize, blossom, be fertilized, go to seed and repeat the process again and again and again. "...It must be constantly renovated by fresh streams of the spirit revivifying the dead or dying vehicle and changing it, if it is to acquire a new life. To be perpetually reborn is the condition of a material immortality." So, on the sunrise page of one of his books, wrote Sri Aurobindo. So it is with plants, and when we learn to photosynthesize, so it can be with us. Photosynthesis is plant

physicality, still Earth.

A divine minimalism. The soul is specially designed to function through a human body. Energy body, mental body, do not constitute this bulb. Not at all.

"Salvation is physical."

He was a Levite, a priest of God. You don't have to be blind to be a Levite, but it helps. Marlin, Texas, was a bustling place in those days and the crowds he drew were like chickens staring at a mongoose; he mesmerized them. Why were they staring at him? He wasn't a pole dancer. It's just that, when he (Blind Willie) sang, he would strip down to the divine spark.

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I saw it with my own eyes. The sun is pulsing. I could see it clearly,





in the sky, over the Pacific. Those pulsations of love, nothing else, are all that carry us on. Good morning, San Francisco. The city was in flames, the city was burning. The fire neither consumed nor marred the flesh. I read in a newspaper, just the other day, that astrophysicists now have photographic proof the sun actually pulses. The soul that played itself is one of those pulses and so am I and so are you.

What is it to be a human being? Just what kind of sound could that make? The first manmade object to leave this solar system, the Voyager One spacecraft, carries to our fellow aliens in the universe a copper-plated gold disk recording the sound of human loneliness. 1977, the hundredth anniversary of the phonograph. His music always was propulsive and now exploding back to the stars that exploded us. A song switchblade for his slide now skipping past the nebulae. Just try to describe the scrapings on the bottleneck guitar, that no one can fully reproduce, that mingle in a strangely perfect way with the wordless chanting of a blind Texas street singer. It's been called "the most soulful, transcendent piece of music ever made in America" (Ry Cooder, Reed College '71, among the best we still have adventuring out into deep blues). It so affected Carl Sagan, who had it playing in his Cosmos of "billions and billions of stars." That spaceship carried what was deepest in the human heart and highest in the human mind to our kindred souls in the cosmos. Carl Sagan chose, or he with a few others lobbied to include, the music of a blind gospel street singer who lived out his days in Beaumont, Texas, the beginning of bayou country. The night is a dark water and sorrow with no end comes pouring out of that pit. Dark is the night, cold is the ground. So the day goes and all the days go. In this

endless expanse of lamentation, what makes us matter? What makes anything matter? It is from these depths that in his best remembered song, Blind Willie asks the question, What is the soul of a man? And he tendered a reply.

Son House sang: "The blues ain't nothing but a lowdown shaking chill/ If you ain't had'em boys, I hope you never will." Blind Willie Johnson's music was redemption from the blues, to absorb our suffering so that we could feel our soul and receive into it the Holy Spirit. Just as surely as any medieval chemist with an alembic, he was doing alchemy, in the laboratory of the spirit. His music was alchemy performed in the street. The ladder up is all covered with water, the poor mostly stay poor or they just get poorer.

*The devil couldn't invent more barbarous slavery than our own American people have been forced to endure.*

For the soul called the Holy Spirit down with rhythm and in song as a Presence in the people. Those songs born of sorrow founded their spirit to survive death by slavery beneath our hoods of servitude. To steal away to one's home in the Lord when one has been stolen from one's home by smiling white lords. Would you rather be kept on a string or strung up on a tree? The cotton-picking machines that powered the industrial revolution had hands that moved almost as mightily as their heads, and if they were liberated, warned the revolutionary Thomas Jefferson, they would come forth with "ten thousand recollections" of the insufferable crimes of subjection so long visited upon them. A powerful unity grows inside a people made to suffer so. Within suffering comes that power to make this finite people infinitely one. The deep blue songs with their

holy spirit music and wild psalms of syncopation came into being only in America. Black and Indian red are our own indigenous music. The Mardi Gras is our unmasking. The spiritual is our folk song and blues the music of our country. Jazz is, and is begetting, our own American beauty. God of the white people is the same as the God of black—only difference being that black people have fought the ridges of belief—and still believe. From their sorrow they have dreamed alive a state where we the people would be judged by our souls alone. They remembered a time and a place where this was so. There was a Garden on this Earth—its inhabitants wore black skin. They were not the poorer because they did not share in the fat riches of our estrangement or our heavenly blindness or our prevailing pallor. These things black people think they only dream but deep inside that place all hold common, they remember.

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So please don't ever think this blind pilgrim didn't know the score. He was no apologist for anything. Blind Willie was way too sharp to have any doubt about what kitchen utensil he would be when he grew up. He wasn't here to apologize for the way Jim Crow justice hung black people on the spot. But he didn't keep that rusty old knife in his pocket to hurt people: he put it under his index finger to help make the finest slide guitar sound that you or I could ever hope to hear, so however much we hurt, we can start to heal. Willie Johnson was to gospel-slide guitar what Sister Arizona Dranes was to the gospelbeat piano. And George Washington (Big Wash) Philips was this Texas trinity's founding father, true gospel-blues pioneer, sweetest singer of the three: an innovative string rev-



elator who plucked sheer invention on a fretless zither that he made himself.

We love to immortalize the soul in our minds and our imagination, and we do live on after we die, but how much of us lives on? The same reason we got to integrate as people, we got to integrate our soul, because we're all incomplete unless we do that. An uncivil war goes on in every soul, and it's barbaric how we leave ourselves on the battlefield. All we take with us is our soul; and why is that? The rest of us breaks apart because we don't integrate the black and white of us into a yellow silk twined rainbow orange rose and golden soul. How big is the fire that the soul is, how much have we thrown into it, to make it grow, from the way and what we've lived? It's nothing but a burning light. The soul is immortal but what is a soul without a body?

Willie's answer was sharper than all the very knowledgeable people who answered Oprah Winfrey's question on SuperSoul Sunday in October 2012: What is the soul? It's hard to find in this world one person with sight who wields the sword of truth. This sightless visionary, blinded by lye, saw, with eyes no world can take from him, straight inside the soul of a human being. He saw what's there when all the rest is taken away. He has somewhere on file "the fingerprints of God." He knows "the lure of the becoming." He also knew what the becoming was doing and what fingers can play. Why are we here? What are we building? We are building our soul into a Body.

"It's nothing but a burning light." Don't believe me, and I wouldn't, you can hear him sing it in his own voice. He answered the question better than Deepak Chopra did. Chopra knows but he doesn't have the mantric power to express what this blind man pulled out of some Temple older than Egypt,

older than those Vedic forefathers who shattered the mountain rock with their cry, older than time itself.

*We are all this blind pilgrim. We wander everywhere, looking for we don't know what. We see more images in a single day than our ancestors saw in their whole lives. We see everything but who we are.*

A blind man told us we are nothing but a burning light and we let him freeze to death. So that says we are hopeless, right? I don't think so. Because we are listening to him now, in a world music conversation, and his music is starting to get through to us.

The human situation as Sagan put it: nightfall with no place to sleep. "*The greatest example of slide guitar ever recorded*" (Jack White) and "*the most intense and startling blues record ever made*" (John Clarke, *New York Times*). "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Romans 8:26. Both Willie and the listener are listening to the Spirit itself praying for us in our anguish.

The best contribution we can make to our community is to find, unite with, and express somehow in this surface world this mystic flame hidden somewhere deep inside us.

The best-kept secret in the world!

Why the burning, what justifies all the burning away? It must be a most extreme unimaginable ecstasy that would justify the suffering of our Sophoclean soul and the greater measure of suffering untold. Einstein once rode into that ecstasy on a beam of light, and called it an experiment.

Has Blind Willie got there? Possibly, if we can judge by the intensity

with which he lived in the question, for the God-blessed child has got his own soul in his own sight. For Blind Willie Johnson, the Bible was his life; not an open-and-shut book on its dusty case. It answered a sincere question with the blade of a deeper mark.

He walked the dusty streets of Texas and he found people the Bible stories tell about, and they walked through his imagination, back into the small rooms in which he lived. It is full of multitudes of contradiction. This is what Christ taught in the temple, at least in the last verse of Blind Willie Johnson's song. The little soul of a man, the blind pilgrim, will consume the nature, or perhaps make our nature once and for all human, this puny speck of nothing be a pulsing spark of everything, the body will be as much soul as the soul is, body equal with soul, heaven and earth in us be equal and one. It takes a blind man to see what we cannot.

The sightless visionary saw and—if anybody can—surely can tell us if this is what the soul is. If there's an owner's manual for a human being, it is in the soul's possession. Am I right? I don't rightly know.

If anybody can, Willie Johnson surely could tell me (us) if this is what the soul is. If anybody can, it would be Blind Willie. But the blind pilgrim has "left the solar system." We must go our own space probe, voyaging into the nature of the powers that lie beyond us, and move us. Move us into the field of the mysterious forces that produced our kind. A blind man saw this! And said it. We can no longer say that we can't.

The human soul on fire is stronger than the Universe: it can dream itself alive.

*So we have to feel it out for ourselves. We've got to find it out and we've got to be lost to do that.*



*Then shall a voice in the sullen wood  
Enlighten the sighted blind;  
Then shall the winter twilight know,  
And so shall all mankind.  
(Amanda Emerson)*

Whatever they mean, these five or six words (*It's*) *nothing but a burning light* carry some kind of uncanny power, some insight only a blind pilgrim sees as long as we won't open our eyes.

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### *A Solar Poem*

His life's more than a black dove's tale  
of mayhem and misfortune,  
blindness and burning,  
ostracism and obscurity.  
No more auctioned off, many thousands  
gone, no more.  
The tarry whip,  
each lash on our face, that sound  
No more!  
Scraps of lost Aeschylean tragedy.  
No! Each of us children  
from whatever time we are,  
is a sun—  
a sol with our system,  
whirling round us as we go  
turning on and on  
round our own  
supermassive black core galactic.  
Willie stands out on the corner of a  
street without walls.  
Through his sound, and our fury  
of surrounding clamor he listens.  
All claims we lay  
for the little we own  
but enlighten him they refer  
to the same living body  
in its standard length.  
Every day he prayed for a new life  
and of these lives each is a miracle.  
He showed us  
what the soul of a man could look like.  
His first guitar was one string,

and when released, and played  
permitted him that love  
would voyage through his hands.  
A shower of mercy in motion  
with the slide of his broken bottle.  
Some vast light of grace lit up  
in the beginning  
of his very first words.

In his voice the mother's love  
taken from him as a baby.  
We are each in our Shakespearian  
"will a hunter in the trails of light."

The 21st century is  
a tiny space in time when we who will,  
may find our soul.  
The only gravity out there  
is love, love and only love.  
The only thing we  
take with us  
as we travel  
blind like Willie to all  
those gravely lights out there  
is our soul.

\*\*\*\*\*

This is severely personal. Why?  
Because my wife died. Friend, she was  
the only friend I ever had. I left her  
ten minutes and found her lying cold  
and blue in our bed. Little did I know,  
by six that evening, she'd be playing  
a golden harp. Only someone truly  
comfortable with their own spirituality  
can bring true spiritual comfort to  
others. Despair-burdened people like  
me all over this pale blue dot carry on  
because this penniless blind preacher  
has given us comfort. But no one on  
earth can take her place.

I listened to Blind Willie Johnson's  
music.

Thirty songs. All of him that ever  
got put to wax.

With my whole body fallen quiet I  
heard "Dark Was the Night." For once,

life felt like itself. When your whole  
world goes dark, like it was for Charley  
Patton and "Mississippi" Max Haymes,  
the way it is for me, you need to feel the  
breathing of someone who's listening.

Coming from out there, over the  
edge-of-reach of the solar wind, past  
the cloud of comets, way past cool into  
frozen, I feel this presence. I know it's  
from the Voyager. Something is not  
only present. Someone is there.

As it was when astronaut Mitchell,  
out past the massed mind of those  
grey grey thoughts from the good  
old thinkers on Earth, sitting in his  
spaceship in that silence, could feel—  
in that vacuum, vacant of the usual  
thoughts—a palpable presence. It was  
so solid at times he could almost touch  
it. It spun around everything, like the  
real "Golden Record." Weightless in  
his cabin, Captain Edgar fell awake.  
He'd been stuffed too full of business,  
back on Earth, to feel it before.

Well, I can feel that now. Weightless  
and empty in this old New England  
farmhouse. I can feel the music of  
Blind Willie Johnson, that "inter-  
planetary musician" (in words of Ry  
Cooder) carrying some power of that  
presence, carrying it a long way. And  
the wordless voice of his strings wedded  
with that humming wire-strung  
voice are, almost, strong enough to  
rescue the love.

From where now? Her body was  
blue and cold when I found her here  
in our bed. I'd been away, upstairs, ten  
minutes. Come back. Out cold. Gone.

The pain gets to be too much, for  
our lover's, for a savior's, body, to bear,  
and the soul must break absolutely  
free of it all, of all that is, nothing but  
stuff, called and going back, outside  
starry space, to where nothing burns  
but that light.

Every soul is divine, every soul  
exalted. Somehow in this wilderness





I feel God speaking to my heart. Her body is gone but the wordless voice of his strings has the strength to rescue my love. I sure hope He spoke to her when her body turned blue and cold. I was away from her ten minutes, up the New England stairs pounding the keyboard of this Steve Jobs machine, eyes moving screen to screen on an insanely great monitor, searching out side effects of her pharmaceutical treatment regimen.

I want to live in a world where nobody has to die like that. Call it by any name you want. Call it termination shock syndrome: the only friend I ever had is dead, and I only have you to talk to. Are you listening? And it wasn't her alone, it was my family as I knew it which died that cold hearted Massachusetts summer day blown away on the 67th anniversary of Hiroshima and the birth anniversary of my sister my stranger.

Now, it feels like anything can happen, and I'd prefer that it didn't.

\*\*\*\*\*

In this big open-ended dialogue in this room with enough room for us all—by the beautiful Tornio River and an unseen reindeer herding Sami running with Aurora Borealis—in the Finnish Arctic Circle where there are no one way mirrors. No special lists, no separation. Not even from “the ever-living whom we name as dead.”

Who or what is the we, when we are each one all of us? Frozen dialogue: open sesame. Two people sometimes reflectively talk: they speak while looking only at each other, while sitting on chairs somewhere in one big room, in front of all the others sitting on unfolding chairs, so everything that they say, all we other people can hear. We

only talk so all of us hear whatever we say, while we're all here, in starry space altogether.

So we reflect and talk, we reflect talk, and then we keep on talking about it.

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It was Shane Ford who said, “There is a monument to Blind Willie Johnson. You hear it every time one of his disks starts playing.” It was also Shane Ford, a young Texan independent filmmaker, and Anna Obek, who were instrumental in obtaining for Blind Willie Johnson his Texas Historical Marker. Its dedication took place in a ceremony held December 15, 2010, in Beaumont near Pilgrim's Rest Baptist Church. Shane told me by phone on February 25, 2013, that he believes Blind Willie Johnson was born in or very, very close to Temple, Texas.

“When Christ stepped in at the Temple The people all stood amazed. He was teaching the lawyers and the doctors How to raise a man from the grave.”

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Yes, this most spectral of songsters took his responsibility very seriously. He asked the question and answered it. Perfectly. What is the soul, That's the Whole Shebang. The human being's that very creature who's defined by our mind. Yet this sightless visionary saw us clear enough to say it: we are only human when we don't let our mind define us.

He asks the questions both our mind and life are asking. His answer's the perfect answer Why because it is pure vision: NOTHING BUT A BURNING LIGHT so clear our sightless minds protest: Hey, that's no answer at all.

\*\*\*\*\*

There are some nights when I wander outside after not being able to sleep. Every now and again I will see Willie, sitting under an awning on some street corner between two stars, chuckling. Sometimes a sparse crowd will begin to gather and at other times it's just me. And he begins playing, throwing it all back at us while he growls, griot that he is, and his sawed-off bottle neck slides, going, Catch. It's not something our minds can see, not something our many lives can easily act upon.

So, what are we going to do about it?

*It was on one of these lonesome nights that I found an old woman had taken Johnson's place under the awning. She looked pretty much the way I was feeling. I was trying to slide my way through the gospel truth that Blind Willie died two years to the day before the sparkler of my life was born. Can the intensity they seem to share come from anywhere else but Texas or Louisiana—or the soul? I was thinking about my wife Lucie and how she wasn't there; she was so bright she burned to these very ashes in this very beautiful cobalt blue box. The old woman called to me and began to softly speak. She told me that she had come a long way and that she was looking for her son. She said she heard he played the guitar. I knew immediately who she was talking about. And then she had a question, a question I have been unable to answer. So I hope you don't mind that I'm throwing it back at you.*

*When Blind Willie Johnson looks you in the bridge between your eyes, which one's gonna twinkle? Which one will incandesce?*



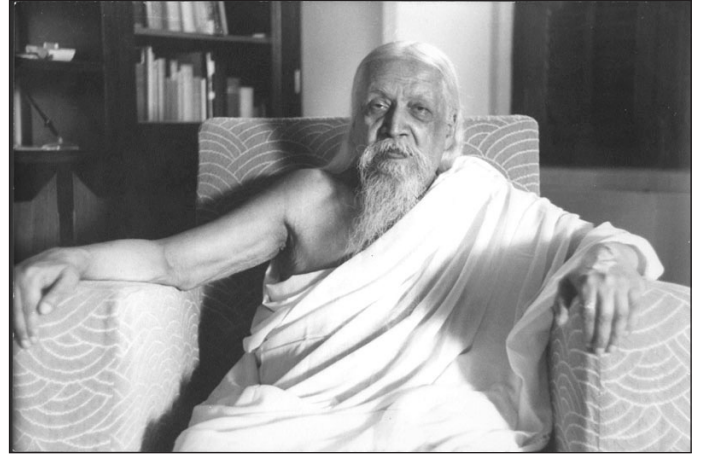
## Source material

### Realization of the psychic being

by Sri Aurobindo

As the crust of the outer nature cracks, as the walls of inner separation break down, the inner light gets through, the inner fire burns in the heart, the substance of the nature and the stuff of consciousness refine to a greater subtlety and purity, and the deeper psychic experiences, those which are not solely of an inner mental or inner vital character, become possible in this subtler, purer, finer substance; the soul begins to unveil itself, the psychic personality reaches its full stature. The soul, the psychic entity, then manifests itself as the central being which upholds mind and life and body and supports all the other powers and functions of the Spirit; it takes up its greater function as the guide and ruler of the nature. A guidance, a governance begins from within which exposes every movement to the light of Truth, repels what is false, obscure, opposed to the divine realisation: every region of the being, every nook and corner of it, every movement, formation, direction, inclination of thought, will, emotion, sensation, action, reaction, motive, disposition, propensity, desire, habit of the conscious or subconscious physical, even the most concealed, camouflaged, mute, recondite, is lighted up with the unerring psychic light, their confusions dissipated, their tangles disentangled, their obscurities, deceptions, self-deceptions precisely indicated and removed; all is purified, set right, the whole nature harmonised, modulated in the psychic key, put in spiritual order. This process may be rapid or tardy according to the amount of obscurity and resistance still left in the nature, but it goes on unfalteringly so long as it is not complete. As a final result the whole conscious being is made perfectly apt for spiritual experience of every kind, turned towards spiritual truth of thought, feeling, sense, action, tuned to the right responses, delivered from the darkness and stubbornness of the tamasic inertia, the turbidities and turbulences and impurities of the rajasic passion and restless unharmonised kinetism, the enlightened rigidities and sattwic limitations or poised balancements of constructed equilibrium which are the character of the Ignorance.

This is the first result, but the second is a free inflow of all kinds of spiritual experience, experience of the Self, experience of the Ishwara and the Divine Shakti, experience of cosmic consciousness, a direct touch with cosmic



forces and with the occult movements of universal Nature, a psychic sympathy and unity and inner communication and interchanges of all kinds with other beings and with Nature, illuminations of the mind by knowledge, illuminations of the heart by love and devotion and spiritual joy and ecstasy, illuminations of the sense and the body by higher experience, illuminations of dynamic action in the truth and largeness of a purified mind and heart and soul, the certitudes of the divine light and guidance, the joy and power of the divine force working in the will and the conduct. These experiences are the result of an opening outward of the inner and inmost being and nature; for then there comes into play the soul's power of unerring inherent consciousness, its vision, its touch on things which is superior to any mental cognition; there is there, native to the psychic consciousness in its pure working, an immediate sense of the world and its beings, a direct inner contact with them and a direct contact with the Self and with the Divine,—a direct knowledge, a direct sight of Truth and of all truths, a direct penetrating spiritual emotion and feeling, a direct intuition of right will and right action, a power to rule and to create an order of the being not by the gropings of the superficial self, but from within, from the inner truth of self and things and the occult realities of Nature. (*The Life Divine*, pp. 941-942)

\* \* \*

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. This is the first change to be made. (*Letters on Yoga III*, p. 347)



## Finding the psychic being

by the Mother

In order to find the soul you must go in this way (gesture of going deep within), like this, draw back from the surface, withdraw deep within and enter, enter, enter, go down, down, down into a very deep hole, silent, immobile, and there, there's a kind of... something warm, quiet, rich in substance and very still, and very full, like a sweetness—that is the soul.

And if one is insistent and is conscious oneself, then there comes a kind of plenitude which gives the feeling of something complete that contains unfathomable depths in which, should one enter, one feels that many secrets would be revealed... like the reflection in very peaceful waters of something that is eternal. And one no longer feels limited by time.

One has the feeling of having always been and of being for eternity.

That is when one has touched the core of the soul.

And if the contact has been conscious and complete enough, it liberates you from the bondage of outer form; you no longer feel that you live only because you have a body. That is usually the ordinary sensation of the being, to be so tied to this outer form that when one thinks of “myself” one thinks of the body. That is the usual thing. The personal reality is the body's reality. It is only when one has made an effort for inner development and tried to find something that is a little more stable in one's being, that one can begin to feel that this “something” which is permanently conscious throughout all ages and all change, this something must be “myself”. But that already requires a study that is rather deep. Otherwise if you think “I am going to do this”, “I need that”, it is always your body, a small kind of will which is a mixture of sensations, of more or less confused sentimental reactions, and still more confused thoughts which form a mixture and are animated by an impulse, an attraction, a desire, some sort of a will; and all that momentarily becomes “myself”—but not directly, for one does not conceive this “myself” as independent of the head, the trunk, the arms and legs and all that moves—it is very closely linked.

It is only after having thought much, seen much, studied much, observed much that you begin to realise that the one is more or less independent of the other and that the will behind can make it either act or not act, and you begin not to be completely identified with the movement, the ac-



tion, the realisation—that something is floating. But you have to observe much to see that.

And then you must observe much more still to see that this, the second thing that is there, this kind of active conscious will, is set in motion by “something else” which watches, judges, decides and tries to found its decisions on knowledge—that happens even much later. And so, when you begin to see this “something else”, you begin to see that it has the power to set in motion the second thing, which is an active will; and not only that, but that it has a very direct and very important action on the reactions, the feelings, the sensations, and that finally it can have control over all the movements of the being—this part which watches, observes, judges and decides.

That is the beginning of control.

When one becomes conscious of that, one has seized the thread, and when one speaks of control, one can know, “Ah! Yes, this is what has the power of control.”

This is how one learns to look at oneself. (*Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, pp. 310-311)

One has a big responsibility, it is to fulfil a special mission that one is born upon earth [...] The more conscious and individualised one becomes, the more should one have the sense of responsibility. But this is what happens at a given moment; one begins to think that one is here not without reason, without purpose. One realises suddenly that one is here because there is something to be done and this something is not anything egoistic. This seems to me the most logical way of entering upon the path—all of a sudden to realise, “Since I am here, it means that I have a mission to fulfil. Since I have been endowed with a consciousness, it is that I have something to do with that consciousness—what is it?”

Generally, it seems to me that this is the first question one should put to oneself: “Why am I here?” (*Questions and Answers 1950-1951*, p. 246)



## *The poetry room*

## The lost boat<sup>1</sup>

At the way's end when the shore raised up its dim line and remote  
lights from the port glimmered,  
Then a cloud darkened the sky's brink and the wind's scream was  
the shrill laugh of a loosed demon  
And the huge passion of storm leaped with its bright stabs and the  
long crashing of death's thunder,  
As if haled by an unseen hand fled the boat lost on the wide  
homeless forlorn ocean.  
Is it Chance smites? is it Fate's irony? dead workings or blind  
purpose of brute Nature?  
Or man's own deeds that return back on his doomed head with a  
stark justice, a fixed vengeance?  
Or a dread Will from behind Life that regards pain and salutes  
death with a hard laughter?  
Is it God's might or a Force rules in this dense jungle of events,  
deeds and our thought's strivings?  
Yet perhaps sank not the bright lives and their glad venturings  
foiled, drowned in the grey ocean,  
But with long wandering they reached an unknown shore and a  
strange sun and a new azure,  
Amid bright splendour of beast glories and birds' music and deep  
hues, an enriched Nature  
And a new life that could draw near to divine meanings and touched  
close the concealed purpose.  
In a chance happening, fate's whims and the blind workings or dead  
drive of a brute Nature,  
In her dire Titan caprice, strength that to death drifts and to doom,  
hidden a Will labours.  
Not with one moment of sharp close or the slow fall of a dim  
curtain the play ceases:  
Yet is there Time to be crossed, lives to be lived out, the unplayed  
acts of the soul's drama.

—Sri Aurobindo

## The eagle above us<sup>2</sup>

In the sky the eagle, there is his place, there far above us.  
Now he appears there.  
He holds his world fast in his talons.  
The world has put on a gray dress, a beautiful living,  
    watery dress of clouds.  
There he is, far above us in the middle of the sky.  
There he waits for the words of Tetewan

Shining, he looks down on his world.  
He looks far into the west.  
Shining, he looks upon the water of life.  
His countenance is full of terrible disaster.  
His eye is glorious.  
His feet are already dark-red.

There he is, far above us in the middle of the  
sky.  
There he remembers those who live here on  
earth.  
He spreads his wings over them.  
Under his spread wings the gods, rain, under  
them the dew falls.  
Beautiful dew of life appears here on earth.

Here he speaks above us.  
Here below men hear it, beautiful are the words  
that are heard here below.  
They are heard below, where Mother Tetewan  
dwells far in the underworld.  
There the Mother hears him.  
She too speaks: Tetewan's words are heard here  
above.  
Here they meet the words of the eagle, here they  
both come together.  
We hear them already mingled together.  
The eagle's words fade away over the far water  
of life.  
There they die away in the middle of the sky.  
There very far off they die away.

—Anonymous Native American

## Shootingway ceremony prayer<sup>2</sup>

Dark young pine, at the center of the earth  
    originating,  
I have made your sacrifice.  
Whiteshell, turquoise, abalone beautiful,  
  
Jet beautiful, fool's gold beautiful, blue pollen  
    beautiful,  
    Reed pollen, pollen beautiful, your sacrifices I  
        have made.  
This day your child I have become, I say.  
  
Watch over me.  
Hold your hand before me in protection.



Stand guard for me, speak in defense of me.  
As I speak for you, speak for me.  
As you speak for me, so will I speak for you.

May it be beautiful before me,  
May it be beautiful behind me,  
May it be beautiful below me,  
May it be beautiful above me,  
May it be beautiful all around me.

I am restored in beauty.  
I am restored in beauty.  
I am restored in beauty.  
I am restored in beauty.

—Anonymous Native American

### Song of the Son<sup>3</sup>

Pour O pour that parting soul in song,  
O pour it in the sawdust glow of night,  
Into the velvet pine-smoke air to-night.  
And let the valley carry it along,  
And let the valley carry it along.

O land and soil, red soil and sweet-gum tree,  
So scant of grass, so profligate of pines,  
Now just before an epoch's sun declines  
Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee,  
Thy son, I have in time returned to thee.

In time, for though the sun is setting on  
A song-lit race of slaves, it has not set;  
Though late, O soil, it is not too late yet  
To catch thy plaintive soul, leaving, soon gone.

O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums,  
Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air,  
Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare  
One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes

An everlasting song, a singing tree,  
Caroling softly souls of slavery,  
What they were, and what they are to me,  
Caroling softly souls of slavery.

—Jean Toomer

### The Sun of Truth

The Sun of Truth lies lost, immersed in Night,  
Who weaves her spell-shrouds over darkened day.  
Our thoughts, our fond frail hopes are birds in flight  
Bearing on swift dark wings our life away.  
We gaze in vain at things beyond our sight  
And yearn vainly for restless joy to stay.  
We find frailty, at last, in all our might;  
Beauty and love contain their own decay.  
And yet, whilst love and joy and life are brief,  
And changing self perhaps no more than name,  
And Sorrow sings her ancient songs of grief,  
In the heart's hidden temple burns a Flame.  
The dark is doomed at last to die of Light  
And life, divine, shall blossom in Delight.

—Peter Cooke

### In Her cradle of love (for Mitra Lamb)

I was swinging in the cradle of love,  
Of my beloved Mother,  
Who from whence originated I know not;  
But surely I know now,  
She came to resolve the knots in my heart,  
And set me free to fly in her supernal skies.

Sweet lullabies she sang to me,  
And put my mind to sleep.  
Awakening from there within my dead spirits,  
She immersed me in the deep and fathomless  
Oasis of her serene love and boundless passion.

As each day falls and new day begins,  
I pray her it be a better morrow and today;  
And I shall live in the shadow of her love  
Where the death and misery of the world dare not touch.

—Ravi Narayanan

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Poems*, by Sri Aurobindo. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *World Poetry: An anthology of verse from antiquity to our time*, Katherine Washburn and John S. Major, Editors; Clifton Fadiman, General Editor. New York: Norton, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> *Black Poets of the United States*, by Jean Wagner, Translated by Kenneth Douglas. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973.



## *Apropos*

Nowhere can man find a quieter or more untroubled retreat than in his own soul. —Marcus Aurelius

Your Soul—that inner quiet space—is yours to consult. It will always guide you in the right direction. —Wayne Dyer

A Soul without a high aim is like a ship without a rudder. —Eileen Caddy

Do not feel lonely, the entire Universe is inside you. —Rumi

Tears are summer showers to the Soul. —Alfred Austin

You are a beautiful soul hidden by the trench coat of the ego. —Mike Dolan

We should seize every opportunity to give encouragement. Encouragement is oxygen to the Soul. —George Adams

I think immortality is the passing of a Soul through many lives or experiences, and such as are truly lived, used and learned, help on to the next, each growing richer, happier and higher, carrying with it only the real memories of what has gone before. —Louisa May Alcott

The oak sleeps in the acorn, the bird waits in the egg, and in the highest vision of the Soul, a waking Angel stirs. —James Allen

Happiness is a quality of the Soul, not a function of one's material circumstances. —Aristotle

Accustom yourself continually to make many acts of love, for they enkindle and melt the Soul. —Saint Teresa of Avila

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the Souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the Universe and all its powers, and when they realize at the center of the Universe dwells the Great Spirit, and that its center is really everywhere, it is within each of us. —Black Elk

Love is the beauty of the Soul. —St. Augustine

The Soul becomes dyed with the colour of its thoughts. —Marcus Aurelius

To live happily is an inward power of the Soul. —Marcus Aurelius

The authentic self is the Soul made visible. —Sarah Ban Breathnach

The Soul is healed by being with children. —Fyodor Dostoevsky

Important encounters are planned by the Souls, long before the bodies see each other. —Paulo Coelho

The love of God, unutterable and perfect flows into a pure Soul the way that light rushes into a transparent object. The more love that it finds, the more it gives itself, so that, as we grow more clear and open, the more complete the joy of loving is. And the more the Souls, who resonate together, the greater the intensity of their love for, mirror-like, each Soul reflects the others. —Dante

We are all connected, each and everyone of us has a Soul, and all of our Souls are one, they are all a part of God. —Lorna Byrne

You will find when you open your heart and can fill it with loving, beautiful thoughts, that you will want to love all those Souls you come into contact with, no matter who they are. —Eileen Caddy

Stop acting so small. You are the Universe in ecstatic motion. —Rumi

Put your ear down close to your soul and listen hard. —Anne Sexton

