

Collaboration

Winter 2019/2020

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 44, No. 3



Where the universe begins by Arnab Chowdhury •
How I joined the Ashram: based on recordings of Udar Pinto •
“I had seen eternity in a moment” by Harald Fehrenbach •
Involution and evolution by Larry Seidlitz •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • The poetry room • Apropos



About the art on the front and back cover

Front cover: This image brings to mind the exquisite mystery of our place in the universe. It was created by Angela Yuriko Smith and displayed on the Pixabay site.

Back cover: This image speaks of our star-dust origins, those places in the universe where stars are born, where we are born. It was created by Gerd Altmann, known as Geralt, and shown on the Pixabay website.

The authors and poets

Alan (alan@auroville.org.in) is a British Aurovillian and co-editor of Auroville Today.

Milan Bhardwaj (amitmilan@gmail.com), inspired by Savitri at a young age, became a lecturer on English literature in India, and now lives in Cupertino, CA where she is a stay-at-home mother.

Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) was an English poet, philosopher and anthropologist.

William Cowper (1731-1800) was a popular English poet, a forerunner of the Romantic poets.

Dakshina (dakshina.sasp@gmail.com) is a resident and director of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, an ashram in Lodi, CA.

Arnab Chowdhury (www.ninad.in) is founder-composer-teacher of 'Know Your Rhythm', a training program helping seekers discover their musicality. He works with Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville and other evolution-seeking groups.

Harald Fehrenbach (harfe68@web.de) lives in the village of Heimbach, Germany, near Freiburg. For more than 30 years, yoga, spirituality, philosophy and related subjects have been his passion.

Santosh Krinsky (santoshk@msn.com) is the founder of Lotus Press, and the President of the Institute for Wholistic Education.

Mandakini Lucien-Brun (manda.lucien.brun@gmail.com) is on the board of Auroville International and is helping to raise funds for AV land.

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

Julian Lines (julianlines@gmail.com) resides at Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, is President of its Board of Trustees and an organizer for AUM 2020.

Rita Chaudhuri Pease is the eldest daughter of Haridas and Bina Chaudhuri and is currently serving as President of the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF). Rita has been active in the CIF Ashram in San Francisco since its inception in 1956.

Radhe Pfau (radhe@lagracecenter.com) is Executive Director of La Grace Sri Aurobindo Integral Life Center near Greenville, SC.

William Bell Scott (1811-1890) was a Scottish artist, poet and art teacher.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) is widely regarded as the greatest English poet and playwright.

Larry Seidlitz (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is an author, editor, and scholar on Integral Yoga.

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From the office of Collaboration

In this issue, *Current affairs* has reports on the upcoming 2020 AUM and 2020 Sri Aurobindo Integral Yoga Retreat, as well as updates from several American centers. It also has news of the Auroville Art for Land program and new initiatives of the Foundation for World Education (FWE).

In *AV Almanac* we have an article by Alan of *Auroville Today* called "The Employees of Auroville". With about two employees per one Aurovilian, they are an undeniably crucial part of the community, but rarely receive the recognition and understanding that they deserve, something this article begins to address.

In the *Salon*, we have a short article by Arnab Chowdhury on the nature of mantra, its various components, and its efficacy for facilitating inner experience.

In *Chronicles* we have two articles. The first is by Shyam Kumari and is based on recordings of Udar Pinto, one of the early disciples who was a powerful instrument of the Mother in building up the Ashram. In this article we learn of the unconventional ways in which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sometimes worked with their disciples. The second article is by Harald Fehrenbach, a devotee in Germany, who has a practice, coming quite spontaneously, of reciting and memorizing Sri Aurobindo's poems.

In *Essays* Larry Seidlitz writes on Sri Aurobindo's philosophical conception of involution and evolution. The essay focuses on the process of the manifestation emerging out of Sachchidananda and descending through the grades of consciousness down to matter, and more briefly, of the emergence of consciousness out of matter and its growth toward a physically embodied reunification with the Divine. The essay is complemented in *Source material* by writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the same issue from different angles.

We close with inspiring poems in *The poetry room* and quotations in *Apropos*.

From the publisher: A new look for Collaboration

The Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA) is working on a redesign of *Collaboration*, which since 1974 has offered the evolutionary message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to readers in the U.S. and abroad.

The next issue will feature a new layout, more white space, a greater use of art, and contemporary type fonts. We hope this will bring a heightening of joy, beauty, and celebration to *Collaboration*.

As *Collaboration* moves into the future, in addition to serving our audience of already committed Integral Yoga insiders, we would like it to welcome spiritual seekers ready to meet the majesty, comprehensiveness, and hopefulness of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's vision and work. We think this is a time for collaboration with spiritual partners.

We hope to publish work from the ferment of this yoga that witnesses, enlightens, and shifts forces and trends of today's rather terrifying world, with a special but not exclusive focus on yoga in, for, and of the United States.

For this aspiration to manifest, we plan to develop a collaborative team that will include editorial advisors, writers, poets, artists, and graphics professionals. If you are interested in collaborating on *Collaboration*, please contact John Robert Cornell at johnrobt@cal.net.

The artists

Front cover artist: Angela Yuriko Smith lives in Independence, Missouri and has been a member of Pixabay since September 2017. See her versatile images at: https://www.instagram.com/angela_yuriko_smith/

Back cover artist: Gerd Altmann lives in Freiburg, Germany. He has been a member of Pixabay since 2012, where he has earned 294 Editor's Choice awards.

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

About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current board members: Mateo Needham, president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Lynda Lester, director; Gloria Sayavedra, board member. SAA Associates: Margaret Astrid Phanes, Ananda, and Nick Rytlewski.

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



Current affairs

AUM 2020

To be held July 23rd-26th, 2020

by Julian Lines

Each year the extended community of those connected with integral yoga and Auroville gather to deepen their practice, share insights and enjoy one another's company. This year we will gather at the beautiful Trinity Retreat Center in West Cornwall, Connecticut.

As it is the centenary of the April 24th Darshan Day, when Mother returned to Pondicherry to stay, we are focusing on her life and legacy. Our keynote speaker will be Gilles Guigan, from the Auroville Archives. Gilles, along with a team of others, has been involved in researching Mother's family history and life in Paris. As a researcher in the Auroville Archives he has carried on the legacy of Krishna Tewari in collecting photos and stories about the founding and history of Auroville. The archives are now housed in a building near Town Hall and the Matrimandir where the collection is being cataloged and digitized.

Many of us enjoyed the wonderful retrospective on Mother's life as an artist showing her paintings and drawings over the years as compiled by Mandakini to benefit Acres for Auroville, so Gilles' presentation should bring our understanding to another level.

Other proposed presenters will include:

- Episcopal priest and Zen and Vipassana practitioner, Mary Gates
- Psychotherapist and Auroville Pioneer, Tom O'Brien
- Wealth Management Advisor and Board Member of the Foundation for World Education, Jerry Schwartz
- Yoga Teacher and Foundation for World Education Board Member, John Schlorholtz
- Yoga Teacher and Doula, Camille Rustige Abbe
- Yoga Teacher, Auroville Pioneer and Matagiri Board Member, Wendy Lines
- Naturalist, Art Gingert

Please visit: www.matagiri.org and <https://www.facebook.com/aumconference/> for the latest information.

2020 Sri Aurobindo Integral Yoga Retreat: Integral Living and Well-Being

Sponsored by Sri Aurobindo Center, SE in Greenville, SC, June 24th-28th, 2020

by Radhe Pfau

Body, life and mind are the base upon which the fine flower of the innermost self blooms and the fruit of spiritual life is borne. Yet, we are rarely taught the ways and means through which to arrive not only at good health but to make it an expression and means of fulfilment of our deeper spiritual needs.

In Integral Yoga, sound physical, emotional and mental health is critical for the eventual fulfilment of the ideal of Divine Life. What we aspire to is an integral life and wellness that goes far beyond merely an absence of disease and illness. We seek to live a truer, diviner and more beautiful existence, a state of natural and spontaneous wholeness and harmony, a state of peace and joy in the very cells of the body, a state of integration and unity within and without.

Thus, we have chosen as the theme for our 2020 Sri Aurobindo Integral Yoga Retreat: Integral Living and Well-Being. Let us come together to explore the different dimensions and means to secure a good foundation for the development of a more meaningful and fulfilling life in the Light of the Integral Yoga of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Addressing the nature of disease, the Mother said: "Each spot of the body is symbolical of an inner movement; there is there a world of subtle correspondences . . . The particular place in the body affected by an illness is an index to the nature of the inner disharmony that has taken place. It points to the origin; it is a sign of the cause of the ailment. It reveals too the nature of the resistance that prevents the whole being from advancing at the same high speed. It indicates the treatment and the cure. If one could perfectly understand where the mistake is, find out what has been unreceptive, open that part and put the force and the light there, it would be possible to re-establish in a moment the harmony that has been disturbed and the illness would immediately go."

The retreat schedule includes daily hatha yoga, morning flower walks, OM choirs and experiential sessions. More details can be found at www.integralyogaretreat.com. Should you have any questions, please email or call Radhe (radhe@lagracecenter.com, 505-515-1246).



Matagiri Update

by Julian Lines

We have had a very full first Summer and Fall at our newly constructed Auroville House, where we have built a large yoga studio/performance space and two additional guest rooms. Members of various study circles, international centers along with current and former Aurovilians have spent time with us and made use of the library and Sanctuary. We especially were pleased to host “Awareness Through the Body” workshops with Amir and Aran from Auroville.

Some of India’s finest musicians have played in the new hall where Wendy teaches yoga weekly as well as pranayama. Our new member, Julie, teaches Pilates classes on Fridays. We are looking into a “resident artist” program for the next three years.

During the November 24th Darshan we had a conversation with Debashish Banerji via the internet on “Planes and Parts of the Being” which is now available on YouTube. Just search for “Matagiri Planes”.

Although our activities are flourishing, we have depleted our endowment during this expansion and have many important repairs and projects yet to accomplish:

- Backup generator to provide heat and water during a power outage.
- The roof of the library porch has damaged plywood and must be repaired.
- The upstairs carpets in the original Matagiri cabin need replacing, along with remediation of the walls and roof.
- A cooling/heating system will make guests more comfortable year ‘round.
- Finally, we need to create a Master Plan to develop and evaluate our entire property to best balance the infrastructure including landscaping, gardens and new residential spaces.

We feel now is the time to plant these seeds for Matagiri to fulfill its potential. Please call in advance of your visit so we can greet you and turn on heat in the outer buildings.

Contact: Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, 1218 Wittenberg Road, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457; telephone: (845) 679-8322 (9 am – 7 pm EST); email: info@matagiri.org; website: matagiri.org

SASP Update

by Dakshina

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP) continues to offer residential facilities to those wishing to deepen their Integral Yoga sadhana practice in a concentrated collective Ashram environment. SASP also welcomes guests to participate in our work exchange program, which helps one to enter into the spirit of self-offering through works, Karma Yoga, which is the main vehicle for the sadhana here. Additionally, SASP acts as a regional center for the Northern California area and continues to hold monthly Integral Yoga retreats on the third Saturday of each month. The retreat participants take turns facilitating on a variety of topics and themes relevant to our Integral Yoga practice. We also have study groups three times a week and occasional workshops and other events, like the annual Savitri Immersion that usually takes place in the Spring. Always all the Darshan Days are observed with a special meditation program.

In September 2019, there was a two day workshop on Ancient Wisdom Texts of East and West by Debashish Banerji and Robert McDermott from the California Institute of Integral Studies. During our November 2019 retreat, Julian Lines of Matagiri gave a presentation on the History of Integral Yoga in the US which was filmed by a professional videographer, Jacob Marks, and will be available to the wider IY community when complete. At the end of November 2019, Debashish Banerji launched the first in a series of workshops on the Upanishads, the second of which we look forward to in the early months of 2020. On December 31st, SASP will host the annual New Year’s Eve Program and Bonfire, which is a wonderful way to collectively and spiritually prepare ourselves for the year ahead. During our January 2020 retreat, we will host Jerry Schwartz from the Foundation for World Education who’ll be giving a presentation on Spirituality and Money, the transmutation of money energy in our life and in the world.

2019 has been full of growth and beauty, evident in the evolution of the gardens and renovations of the buildings, little by little the progress is made on the outer level, which reflects the hard won growth on the inner. We’ll be entering 2020 with faith, gratitude and renewed dedication to the realization of Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s vision here in this small corner of the planet.

Contact: SASP, 2621 W. Hwy 12, Lodi, CA 95242; (209) 339-1342 ext 5; email: dakshina.sasp@gmail.com



Sri Aurobindo Center of Honolulu Cultural Integration Fellowship

by Santosh Krinsky

Affiliated with the Institute for Wholistic Education in Silver Lake, WI, the new Hawaii facility is located in Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii, convenient for day-visitors who arrive at Honolulu International Airport, people vacationing in Oahu, as well as devotees who reside in Hawaii. We have a library of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as selected other authors and subjects. We are sponsoring Darshan meditation meetings as well as meeting with visitors one-on-one by appointment. We have begun to develop contact with other groups located in Honolulu as well. In particular we are working closely with a group developing outreach about the science of Ayurveda in Hawaii and expect to meet a number of people who are potentially interested in the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as this collaboration and outreach expands.

Daily blog posts advancing the readings in Sri Aurobindo's major works continue. The current book being focused on is *The Upanishads* with daily posts at <http://sriaurobindostudies.wordpress.com> All prior posts remain archived and accessible for those who want to study any of the earlier volumes in the series. Daily posts also appear on facebook at www.facebook.com/sriaurobindoswritings

New Book Marketing Campaign: We have updated our social media campaign to introduce people to the work of Sri Aurobindo. This features numerous social media platforms, a video interview by a major social media presence focused on "self growth" and a "pay per click" campaign to potentially interested groups of individuals. Well over 10,000 people have now viewed the video that appears on the Self-Growth.com Facebook page (September 6 interview date). In addition, the video is available on YouTube and the Lotus Press website at www.lotuspress.com, among others. This was followed up with a feature article in *Evolve* magazine Fall 2019 issue which hit the stores in November 2019 and will remain current until Spring 2020. The video and the article are also appearing on a number of other social media pages and platforms. The article and video are focused on the Evolutionary Crisis of Humanity and the Role of the Integral Yoga in solving this crisis. The landing page for this program will be the website www.aurobindo.net which has recently undergone some considerable upgrades.

Sri Aurobindo Center of Honolulu, 1520 Ohialoke St., Honolulu, HI 96821; Ph: (808) 367-1820 or (262) 497-2579. www.wholisticinstitute.org; affiliated with the Institute for Wholistic Education, PO Box 1008, Silver Lake, WI 53170.

by Rita Chaudhuri Pease

Inspired by the teachings of Sri Aurobindo which brought the highest values of East and West together in a creative synthesis, the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF) was founded in 1951 by Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri and Mrs. Bina Chaudhuri as a center of universal religion. Seeking a dynamic synthesis of the cultural and spiritual values of all people, CIF teaches the complementarity of the world's great religions and philosophies and celebrates our unity in diversity.

We will commemorate The Life and Legacy of The Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on February 23, 2020 at 11:00 am with a talk by Kundan Singh, PhD, vice president of Cultural Integration Fellowship.

We invite you to join us for our Sunday morning services. Please come to our programs and become an active member! Your participation is much appreciated. Please visit our ashram and our website: www.culturalintegrationfellowship.org for more information.

Art for Land

by Mandakini Lucien-Brun

Now starting its 5th year, Art for Land is a beautiful land-fundraiser whose donations go to help secure the unified and harmonious physical base for Auroville, the City of Dawn. All art works are donated by the artists in the spirit of generous gifting for Auroville's land. In an action of flowing solidarity, donors make a land donation and receive a work of art in recognition of their generosity. The donations are used for securing the still-missing plots in Auroville's Master Plan area via the Acres for Auroville land campaign. A festival of creativity and beauty with a purpose, Art for Land is a collaboration of the Unity Pavilion and the Auroville Art Service with Acres for Auroville.

Art for Land has a stunning collection of creations in various media by artists from Auroville, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, friends in India and the AVI centers abroad. Many of the artists enjoy wide recognition and some works by artists from Sri Aurobindo Ashram are from an earlier time and have been seen and blessed by The Mother.

Art for Land Year 5 will be held at Auroville's Unity Pavilion from 11 January – 21 February 2020. The exhibition will kick off with an Inaugural Ceremony on 11 Janu-



ary at 11 am with the greatly-appreciated presence of Hon. Dr. Kiran Bedi, Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry as the keynote guest. Aurovilian musician Nadaka will present a short solo performance at the event.

The exhibition of the works will be complemented by a parallel fundraiser of donated rare photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Prints and cards of some of the artworks will be available for donations. A large number of events—a variety of concerts, including a full concert by Nadaka, dance performances, inspiring presentations, fundraising meals, the Generosity Fair and closing gala ceremony—will be held during the exhibition period. We warmly invite you to them all! For the events schedule and other Unity Pavilion events: unitypavilion@auroville.org.in

The continually enlarged online gallery of our ever-growing and changing collection is available for viewing, along with more information at artforland.in. Reservations for the works can be made online.

Shipping of works from Auroville is managed by donors at their own expense.

Art for Land is a magnificent showcase for Auroville's great creativity and that of its friends—and all donations go for the land! We warmly encourage interested artists to collaborate and donate works, and warmly invite donors to contribute their generosity in return!

Contact: Jaya or Devasmita at 91-413-262-3576; artforland@auroville.org.in; unitypavilion@auroville.org.in; lfau@auroville.org.in; www.artforland.in

New initiatives of the FWE

The Foundation for World Education (FWE) embarked upon a new initiative that helps Integral Yoga Centers and related organizations to work towards long-term financial sustainability.

The Foundation has set aside \$100,000 for the creation of endowment funds to support qualifying organizations by offering 20 percent matching grants (up to a maximum of \$10,000 per Center) until December 31st, 2020.

A second initiative is on the topic of Spirituality and Money. Jerry Schwartz, board member and director of investments for FWE, has given several workshops on this topic of transmutation of the Money Power and is willing to travel to any center that would be interested in hosting such a presentation. There is also a DVD available on this topic, made several years ago, that is free for the asking.

For more details on either or both these initiatives, contact info@FoundationForWorldEducation.org.

AV almanac

The employees of Auroville

by Alan

Reprinted from Auroville Today, November 2019 Issue

Across more than one issue, Auroville Today aims to highlight our employees and their valuable contributions to Auroville's daily functioning. From accountants to gardeners, village social workers to office workers, we foreground their work, their lives, and their thoughts on Auroville and their engagement with the place.

They work in our gardens, our homes, our services and units, in our schools and health centres, at the Town Hall, at Matrimandir. Yet while, in many ways, they are the engine house of Auroville, the people who keep it running, they are also often “invisible”. They do not feature in the community's brochures, most visiting journalists and researchers do not write about them, they are not consulted when important decisions are taken about the community's future, and most Aurovilians know so little about them: about their lives, their hopes, their challenges. We don't even know how many there are.

The last comprehensive survey of workers in Auroville was done in 2000. In that year there were 4179 employees and 3709 of these were surveyed, of whom 2971 were permanent employees and 738 were contract workers. Since then, apart from a more limited survey of institutional employees in commercial units in December, 2016, nobody has attempted to find out how many people come to work in Auroville every day. The figure of 5,000 has been bandied about for years, but nobody really knows.

The 2000 survey did, however, yield some interesting findings, many of which are still very relevant today, according to Harini Sampathkumar of Auroville's Social Research Centre (SRC). There was a high level of job satisfaction (around 70%) and safety and cleanliness in the workplace and the employer/employee relationship were also rated very highly. No doubt this explains why 80% of respondents said that being employed in Auroville was looked upon as a good thing in the surrounding villages. However, employees' feelings about their salary were not so positive.



In the survey, 28% of them felt their wages were 'poor,' and 52% only 'fair.' "This means they felt the wages are not good, but they didn't want to say it negatively," explains Harini. "If you ask them today they will definitely say the wages are not good, even though they tend to compare Auroville wages with Pondicherry where the daily rate may be higher, but where there is no holiday pay or bonuses and, often, little job security."

Financial pressure

In fact, when asked what she considers is the biggest concern of Auroville workers today, she is forthright: "The biggest challenge by far, 99.99%, is financial. And this is true not only of Auroville workers, but also of the villages today and also of a large cross-section of the residents of Auroville. Many of the people are living on the edge because they are in debt, some heavily. In 2000 life was still manageable, now it is a continual strain."

Why?

Harini thinks there are a number of factors. One is the increasing influence of globalisation and the consumer culture that accompanies this. "You see it on the television and definitely want to be part of that; to have a motorcycle, a car, a cell phone etc. It's a huge pressure to go immediately from the bullock cart to the rocket, skipping the steps in between, and hence you end up taking loans for a lifestyle you cannot afford."

Another factor is the privatisation of education and healthcare. Most Auroville workers now send their children to private schools or colleges or, when it comes to healthcare, choose expensive private hospitals and doctors rather than free government facilities, because of the belief that when you pay for it, you get a better product.

"This is not true," says Harini. "JIPMER, the government hospital near Auroville, has some of the best doctors and facilities in India, while many of the private engineering colleges that have sprouted up everywhere are third-rate institutions."

Harini points out that the aspirations of many Auroville employees for their children are unrealistic. "Many of our employees, those who work in the forests, homes etc. are not even first generation literates (in the 2000 survey, of all the workers surveyed 25% were illiterate and most of the others had less than a 10th standard education). They believe that if they can get their son or daughter into a college, after graduation he or she will be automatically earning one lakh a month in an IT firm in Chennai. But this happens in only a few cases—many remain unemployed and unem-

ployable because of the poor training they have received, or because they don't want to leave home to take their chance in the bigger cities.

"But their parents have either sold land or have taken a loan from the bank or from private money lenders to pay for this education, and these loans have to be repaid. If the children can't get a high paying job, which is the case almost all the time, the parents fall into a debt cycle from which they cannot come out."

And then, of course, there are the marriages and other expensive social obligations. Harini mentions her household help who lives very simply. The only working member of her family, "she doesn't have electricity or gas in her home, yet she ran up a huge three lakhs debt in getting her two daughters married. All of her life she will not be able to repay this from her work income. And this is not an exceptional case. A lot of our workers are living on a knife edge, under extreme financial stress, due to their increased vulnerability. I feel strongly that Auroville has a role to play here. I don't know how, but for many individuals there's something bubbling away and the slightest thing can make it go up in flames."

Limited promotion possibilities?

In the 2000 survey, only about 5% of employees described their promotion possibilities and opportunities for further learning on the job as 'good'. Could Auroville do more to provide in-service training for those from the local area to help them acquire new skills and a better salary?

Harini is doubtful. She points out that we have different levels of workers. "We have manual workers but what can they get promoted to? Perhaps after years of experience they will supervise three or four other workers but basically they will still be a mason or a gardener. Then we have the semi-skilled people, like tailors. They may end up doing quality control in a factory but this is not a big promotion. A tailor does not become a designer. In this sense, cottage industries—which are the majority of our commercial units—do not provide much scope for promotion.

"In a bigger unit you are looking at a different skill set. In Auroville, no more than 30 units will require professional managerial skills, and the Aurovilians who are running them now will not spend time and money in training managers, in bringing them up through the ranks, they will just hire them from outside. Maybe now the younger generation has that capacity, but they are still young and need to gain experience elsewhere before coming back to manage a big Auroville unit."



Understanding the deeper purpose

How well do our employees understand the deeper purpose of Auroville? Harini feels that in the early years when people from the village were coming and working on the land with Aurovilians they understood Auroville better than today, “not in words, but in something else. They were sharing our ragi porridge, our simple living, our hardship and our passion; so they could get ‘it’ in another way that was beyond words. The spark was there.

“In fact, this is in line with what Mother said when answering a question about how the Aurovilians should relate to the local villagers. She said that the best way would be education by example: that when they are closely mixing in the life and work of Aurovilians, they not only would get influenced by it and start changing, but also start becoming curious and asking questions. And that is when they could be told more about the purpose of this place.

“But that spark died between that generation and the next generation, because Auroville was developing and there was no longer any time to spend together like this.”

In fact, the 2000 survey showed that Auroville employees, most of whom were second generation, understood very little about the deeper purpose of Auroville. For most of them, Auroville was simply a place that offered job opportunities. Harini doesn’t think this has changed. “If you ask them about this today, at most you will receive a pat reply that Auroville is about human unity.”

The 2000 survey’s conclusion was clear on what needed to happen: “Information dissemination about Auroville, on its ideals and its charter and exposure to Auroville not just through their work situation, should be an active role for the Auroville community to undertake.”

A paradigm shift needed

So why has this not happened? Is it something to do with the way we view employees? Although some have become Aurovilians, is our relationship primarily instrumental—are they seen merely as a means of getting certain things done, a house cleaned, a unit producing more products—rather than something deeper? Is there a need for a major paradigm shift: to consider Auroville’s employees as collaborators in the Auroville experiment rather than people who just service it?

Harini has no doubts about this.

“I believe very deeply that we have to see them as collaborators, because this is to collaborate with the vision of this experiment.” But she is aware that this will not be easy.

“It means, to begin with, listening more and therefore learning more. But many of us don’t want to know too much about other’s lives, it’s a headache. Then there is fear: if seen as collaborators, they are our equals and the terms of the relationship will change. This is why sometimes I am doubtful about this happening soon. I feel we have to get bangs on the heads for people to get together. Collaboration happens effectively when there is adversity.

“When the Thane cyclone happened I thought it would be a turning point regarding strengthening the relationship both among the Aurovilians and between the Aurovilians and the workers. But we missed that bus.”

So are there one or two things we can do now to start building a different relationship with our employees?

“In two words, ‘Be nice’. You never know what is happening in their lives, what have been the circumstances that morning before they come to you for work at eight o’clock. Somebody destroyed their fence or stole something, maybe a sudden death in the family, but you won’t know unless you ask. If you close yourself, there is no opportunity for the entry of that other life. And try not to make overbearing judgments. If an employee falls ill, and we ask ‘Did you go to a doctor?’ and they say ‘We went to a faith healer’, don’t rubbish this. It’s their reality; it’s what they believe in, so respect that. The problem is we think we know. Actually nobody does, but we are in a superior position and hence we think we know.”

But Harini believes there is a possibility for a deeper learning and exchange to happen. She has often been asked to address groups of employees who visit Matrimandir. “Just organising such a visit is a good beginning. It’s a way of saying that Auroville is not just a workplace where people work and get paid. I tell them, ‘You are born free, alone, and when you die, you die alone. But from the moment you start breathing, your socialisation process is framing you into what you think you are. But your contact with the Divine is unique. So can you spend some time here for the next half an hour to experience that your soul is the true you, and the Divine is the Divine and there is nobody else in between. Can you do that?’ And they get it. It makes it meaningful for them.”

Harini also mentions something else. “In the end, people know that from the foreigners in Auroville there is no falseness. They may be rude sometimes, but they are honest and truthful: foreigners don’t have to fear ‘losing face’ which, being a heavy Asian trait, is something our villagers recognize well. This is something villagers appreciate, and this is something we can build upon.”



Salon

Where the universe begins...

by Arnab Chowdhury

The word is a sound expressive of the idea. In the supra-physical plane when an idea has to be realised, one can by repeating the word-expression of it, produce vibrations which prepare the mind for the realisation of the idea. That is the principle of the Mantra and of Japa. One repeats the name of the Divine and the vibrations created in the consciousness prepare the realisation of the Divine. —Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol 27, p. 7)

It is said that the universe began with the vibration of the cosmic OM or AUM.

Like the universe, we begin with the chanting of Omkara which consists of the single syllable—OM.

It is said that Sri Ramakrishna, the guru of Swami Vivekananda, experienced the sound of OM resonating in the singing of the birds, the gentle flow of the river and the waves of the ocean. That energy of Brahman (ultimate Reality) is continually moving like a wave through every place and every sound.

Ancient rishis (sages) identified mantras consisting of elemental sonic vibrations, representing various aspects of the infinite universal consciousness.

Etymologically, the word mantra consists of ‘man’, which is the root of the Sanskrit word for mind; and ‘tra’, which is the root of the word instrument. A mantra can be described as an instrument of the mind, a powerful sound or vibration that you invoke and evoke to enter a deep state of consciousness. So mantra can be described as a sacred utterance, even a syllable, word or series of phonemes, or group of words in Sanskrit.

Some mantras may not have any literal meaning but through their sonic value and musicality are meant to uplift us. Mantras are in the ancient language of Sanskrit, often called Devabhasha, the language of the Gods. The beauty of this language is that it is encoded and becomes sonically all-powerful in mantras. Therefore translations into English in terms of ideation and language constructs have many variants and interpretations, a bit like trying to hold running water in your palms. Mantras have typically different levels of interpretations depending on the state of consciousness of the observer or the Mantra Yoga practitioner.

The resonance of these sonic vibrations from the mantra is meant to focus the mind and create conditions conducive towards an inner experience. The literal meaning of the mantra is considered secondary. The study of mantras requires decades of learning Sanskrit and various sacred texts before one can attempt to translate their literal meaning. The training required to chant a specific mantra consists of Uccharan or pronunciation in Sanskrit with phonemes; learning and practicing with the right rhythmic and melodic structures to feel the musicality of mantras while holding a specific Asana (often Sukhasana) and a specific mudra (Yoga with the fingers).

It is said mispronunciation of mantras could possibly lead to an imbalance of doshas—biological energies found throughout the human body and mind in the ancient science of Ayurveda. The importance of Tala (rhythm), Sur (melody) and Shruti (pitch) in the musicality of mantra is utmost for the yoga seeker to get into a state of harmonious flow both as an individual and part of a group or simply as a listener. Just as in Hatha Yoga, where you hold an Asana, in Mantra Yoga, you hold the Swar (scale) with tonic note (Sa or shadj, Do in Western equivalent) and the 5th (Pa or pancham, So in Western equivalent) with the help of a Tanpura, an ancient Indian Classical stringed instrument which generates drones and overtones from the tonic and the 5th. The Tanpura serves as the sonic pillar for the mantra to adhere to, whether as an individual or a member of the collective voice.

When these are practiced correctly with mantra leading us, we are creating a powerful positive sonic vibration within ourselves and around us. We then arrive at a state of flow, just like when an Asana sequence flows through our bodies as part of Vinyasa Yoga.

As an example of the practice explained above, the mantra which follows has been chanted by the author and may be heard on youtube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZqq9YpkmYA>

Shanti Mantra, as the title signifies, invokes Shanti or Peace within ourselves and in all beings around us. This mantra from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad was officially selected as the closing mantra for the 5th International Yoga Day, June 21st, 2019 by Yoga Protocol, Ministry of Ayush, Govt. of India. (<http://ayush.gov.in/idy>)

The chant with an approximate translation follows:
OM Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah — OM May all be happy,
Sarve Santu Niraamayaah — May all be free from illness.
Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyant — May all see the auspicious,
Maa Kashcid Duhkha Bhaag Bhavet — May no one suffer.
OM Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih — OM Peace, Peace, Peace.



Chronicles

How I joined the Ashram

based on recordings of
Udar Pinto

by Shyam Kumari

To appear in Shyam Kumari's forthcoming book, How I came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Volume 5.



I can't really say I joined the Ashram because there was no actual joining. I would rather say I was assumed in the Ashram. It happened like this.

I had met Mona in England and we were engaged. However, I did not want to marry on my father's money because he would not approve of the marriage. My family is Christian, but the Brahman Christians are rather strict in their marriage selections, and to marry a foreigner would have been quite upsetting to my father. Therefore I preferred to earn my own money. Pondicherry seemed a good place for this and that was why I first came to Pondicherry around 1934. I joined Mr. Robert Gaebel in an export business. His wife, Yvonne Gaebelé, used to come to the Mother, who gave her the name Suvarta.

From 1934 to 1937, though I had been in Pondicherry most of the time, I had never entered the Ashram main building or felt like going for a Darshan or anything like that, even though I had some good friends inside the Ashram.

The first friend I made here was Amal (K.D. Sethna). I knew his brother in Bombay and when he heard I

was going to Pondicherry he asked me to meet Amal. So the first thing I did here was to meet him and we became friends at once. I also became friendly with Purani, Ambu, Dr. Ramachandra and some others.

Amal and I were quite close and we had lots of good times together—so much so in fact that, as I learned later, the Mother herself intervened. She told me this one day. She said that Amal would report to Her on all the things we did together and one day She said: "This Pinto! He is leading my children astray. I will teach him a lesson!" And She certainly did—a great lesson and so wonderful. She tied me up, hands and feet and head and all, into a helpless bundle with the golden cords of Her Love and Joy. I said all this to the Mother and she laughed, "The streams of heaven shall murmur in her laugh."

Mona arrived in February 1937; we got married and our circle of friends naturally increased. The August Darshan was approaching and someone suggested, "Why don't you and your wife come and have Darshan? Mona has come from England. It will be a good experience for her to know something of what Indians do and what is meant by Darshan."

I said, "All right." I myself had not had Darshan and decided it would be a good idea. We asked for permission and received it. Darshan then was not as it is now. There was no long queue. Each person received an appointed time and when he came at that time, no one else would be waiting. There were so few people then that Darshan could be arranged in that manner.

Our assigned time was just before noon. We dressed up in our best clothes—I wore European dress at that time. We went upstairs and were led to the Darshan room where I received a shock which I had not at all expected.

I had a great regard for Sri Aurobindo from what Purani and Amal had told me but at my first sight of Sri Aurobindo the words that came into my head were: "I have seen majesty at last!" This word, "majesty", had attracted me both for its sound and meaning and I had often regretted not ever having seen it. I had seen majestic robes and crowns and all that, but no majestic person. Here I saw—no wonderful robes or any crown—just a simple dhoti and chaddar, but such a wonderful figure of Majesty. I was also a bit awed by it. Then I looked to the Mother and saw there so much sweetness and love that I just ran up to Her and put my head in Her lap. Mona did the same.

I may mention here that our entry was specially noted by Sri Aurobindo. I saw that when we entered he looked at the list and asked the Mother about us. She told us all this later. We were a fine-looking pair. The Mother even remarked to Arjava (John Chadwick) that she did not know English girls could be so beautiful. This was about Mona, of course.

Then, after the Mother had blessed me and caressed my head in her lap, I took up courage to put my head



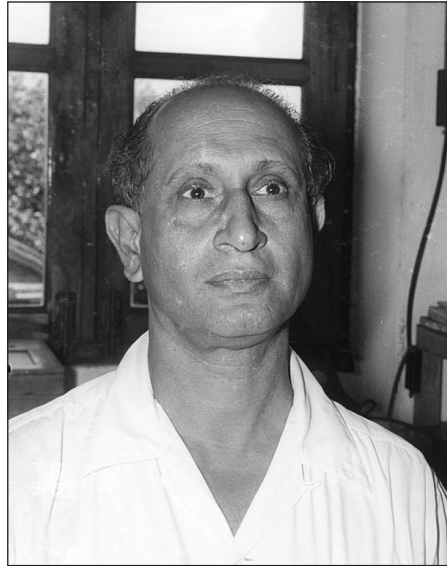
in his lap and felt his love and sweetness that went with His majesty. Then I put my head between them and both blessed me together. Such a marvelous experience.

After that momentous Darshan day I began to be more interested in Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram and I started reading some of his books—"Bases of Yoga, Lights on Yoga". I found myself quite interested in what Sri Aurobindo had to say. I had not thought of all these things before—they were something new to me. Then slowly I began to understand about things, about having spiritual experiences and that made me more interested.

One day I had what I felt was a spiritual experience—something wonderful and beatific like one of the experiences I had read about in the books. I questioned myself, "Are you trying to fool yourself or did you really have an experience? I was not sure whether it was genuine or not, so I wrote to Sri Aurobindo and described the whole thing to him and asked, 'Was it really an experience or an imagination?'"

Sri Aurobindo replied immediately. He wrote me a letter saying, "Yes, it was a very, very good experience." Then he continued on about my doing yoga. Naturally I was a bit surprised because I had no intention at all of doing yoga but had just happened to have a spiritual experience. Somehow it was assumed, taken for granted that I was going to do yoga, "So all right, if I have to do the yoga I'll do the yoga." There was no real decision about it. That is how Mona and I were assumed into the Ashram.

All this happened in 1937 — Mona's arrival, getting married, having our first Darshan, beginning the yoga. Then our daughter was born in November. It was truly the most wonderful year for me. We started going to the meditation, going to the Mother,



Udar Pinto in 1950. Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram

having Darshan and having interviews with the Mother. We became like members of the Ashram though we were living in our own house. I was doing my work, earning money and everything was going well.

Then soon after I decided to stop my work. I said to myself, "If I am going to be part of the Ashram and do yoga, there is no purpose in my continuing to work." We had enough money to carry on and doing business simply didn't interest me any more.

I asked Mona what she felt about joining the Ashram. She answered, "I am your wife, wherever you go I will follow." Mona always maintained and still maintains that she is in the Ashram only because her husband is here and told this to the Mother. The Mother replied, "Yes, Mona, I know that very well. You are here because of Udar, you are not doing yoga. I understand," and Mother smiled so sweetly because she knew what perfection and dedication there is in Mona's work, no matter whether she calls it yoga or anything else. Later on the Mother told me that I was destined to come here and all things that had happened till

then were a kind of accidents arranged by the Divine to bring me to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

I took up the yoga quite seriously. I was, at that time, quite a heavy smoker—20 to 25 cigarettes a day, and pipe and cigars too. In one of my experiences I felt I should give this up and I stopped at once, without really much difficulty. I was quite happy about this, my first real effort at self-discipline. Then when I had my next interview with the Mother, I announced to Her proudly: "Mother, I have given up smoking"—and She replied, "Why? It was not necessary." Really I was astounded at Her answer and then I actually heard the hiss of the air as it escaped from the bubble of my conceit. This first achievement, quite a small thing really, had filled me out with conceit, and The Mother, very sweetly, pricked that bubble. So from the beginning the Mother worked on me in Her truly wonderful but often unexpected way.

At that time children were absolutely forbidden to even enter the gates of the Ashram. The Mother told me that earlier a child who was allowed to come to the Ashram could not bear the pressure, the force of Transformation that had been brought down by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and died. After that there was a rule that no small children would be allowed to enter the Ashram.

My daughter, known then as Judy Anne, was allowed to go to the Ashram. The Mother said, "She may be made an exception because she was exposed to these higher forces before her birth, while Mona was carrying her. Thus she had become more ready to receive the force."

Since she was the only child allowed to come into the Ashram you can imagine what a big fuss everybody made about her. She used to go to the



Mother and became very, very free with her.

When our daughter was christened we named her Judy Anne but she did not seem to like her name. Even when very little she would go to the Mother and say, “Bonjour, Mère.” After the Mother answered, “Bonjour”, she would say, “Today my name is Lily.” Then the Mother would say, “Bonjour, Lily.” It happened like that every day —she would pick up the name of a flower and go and tell the Mother. The Mother would then wish her by that name.

One day, without any prompting, she herself asked Mother, “Mother, why don’t you give me a name?” The Mother replied, “You change names every day, so what is the use of my giving you a name?” She replied, “No, Mother, if you give me a name I’ll not change it.” The Mother said, “I’ll ask Sri Aurobindo.” The next day she told the child, “Sri Aurobindo has given you the name Gauri. Do you know the meaning?” “No, Mother,” the child replied. The Mother said, “It means ‘the fair one’, not fair outside but fair inside. It is a beautiful name.” Gauri never once tried to change her name from then onwards.

Sometime afterward it occurred to me that if Mona had a new name too it would be good, so I asked the Mother, “What about a new name for Mona?” The Mother, as usual, replied, “I will ask Sri Aurobindo.” On the next day she told me, “Sri Aurobindo wants her to keep the name Mona. He said

it suits her and it reminds Sri Aurobindo of Mona Lisa.” Then the Mother added, “You know, Udar, I was Mona Lisa and Sri Aurobindo was Leonardo da Vinci.” I used to see so often on the Mother’s face what is called the ‘Mona Lisa smile’, very beautiful, very sweet but enigmatic.

Then the Second World War started. I had taken a B.Sc. degree with science, physics and mathematics from Bombay University. Then in England I had taken a degree in engineering from London University—also a diploma in aeronautical engineering, aeronautical design and construction. I had quite a lot of practical experi-

craft, to keep it in flying condition. The project required not only pilots and planes but also all the maintenance mechanics, fitters, aircraftsmen, carpenters and electricians.

The British had contact with only a certain class of top people in India, but with the masses of India they had none. Also they realised they would have to leave India soon, so they were looking for some Indians to take up work on their project. They asked me if I would come and work with them in Delhi in the Department of Civil Aviation.

I was very happy in the Ashram and certainly did not want to go to

I was very happy in the Ashram and certainly did not want to go to Delhi and work for the Government. I was a very nationalist-minded Indian and didn’t want to collaborate with the Britishers. When the Mother heard about the offer—of course I told her—she spoke to Sri Aurobindo about it. Sri Aurobindo said, “Whatever his feelings are, he must put them in his pocket. He must go because this is helping the war effort and I want my children to do everything possible to help in the war” (Second World War).

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robindo about it. Sri Aurobindo said, “Whatever his feelings are, he must put them in his pocket. He must go because this is helping the war effort and I want my children to do everything possible to help in the war” (Second World War). Naturally, I went to Delhi along with Mona and Gauri.

Purani gave me the address of Dr. Indra Sen and assured me that he could arrange things for us. Therefore, straightaway we went to Dr. Indra Sen. He was extremely nice and arranged for us a house next to his own. He and Surendra Nath Jauhar used to come to me in the evening to listen to my talk about the Mother and the Ashram.

The Britishers did business in

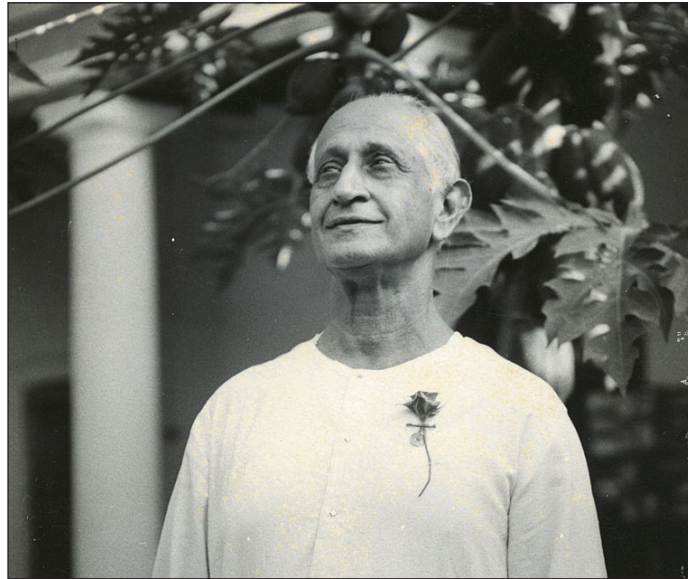


a nice way. They gave me a large office. I had about twenty clerks, typists, and stenographers. The Britishers told me that they wanted centres for aircraft maintenance to be set up all over India. They gave me the work of recruiting a large number of people. I liked the challenge.

I called all my staff and told them that we must work as a family, that I made no rules but only one stipulation—that every letter should be answered within 24 hours. “Oh! Oh!” the whole crowd started laughing. They laughed and laughed and one of them asked, “Sir! Have you ever worked for the Government before?” “No,” I replied. “Yes, that is obvious. Twenty-four hours? If we can get a letter out in 24 days it is a miracle. You talk of 24 hours!” I said, “Look! I don’t know all that, I have no experience but we should try. If you all work together maybe we can achieve it.” All of them agreed to try and thought it was good fun. We took it more in the spirit of play than work.

The Government sent out an advertisement calling for applications for these posts. Thousands upon thousands of applications kept pouring in, because it was a wonderful opportunity for young Indians to get free training at Government expense.

To answer each one of this flood of letters within 24 hours was really a job, but I took it up as a challenge. I saw that all these letters fell into certain categories so we could send classified responses. They gave me a superb stenographer who could take dictation at a terrific speed. We had a competition to see if I could dictate faster than he could take it but I never succeeded.



Udar with his trademark red rose. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

I don’t like stereotyped replies and I insisted each letter should be written personally to the recipient. Each letter had to be typed separately. The thing was very well organised and thousands of letters were sent out daily. What a sensation it caused throughout the Government of India. I used to finish the work by four o’clock and would be eager to go home, but the British officers would stay up to 7 or 8 p.m., pretending to be very busy.

Mona liked Delhi very much. Gauri did not like it at all. She was the child of the Mother. We sent her to a school in Delhi but she was not happy there. She was always wanting to come to the Mother. Finally after working for one year in Delhi I asked for a week’s leave to come to Pondicherry. I planned to leave Mona and Gauri there and go back to Delhi alone.

When I went to the Mother, She said, “I am very happy with the work you are doing but you know Sri Aurobindo has said, ‘He has done enough and can come back.’”

This made me very happy because I had begun to think I was going to be in Delhi for the rest of my life.

Leaving Mona and Gauri here, I went back to Delhi and gave my resignation. The British were shocked. Even my Director protested, “What are you doing? You have a tremendous potential.” This was perfectly true. In fact, since there were no other Indians there to compete with me I knew I would probably be right at the top when the British eventually left—perhaps even become the Director of Civil Aviation. I replied to my director, “Sir, I know that, but you see, I come from an Ashram and whatever the Guru says to me is much more valuable than

anything else.” He was a good chap. He did not know anything much about “Ashram” but he had heard about “Guru”. He said, “Yes, I suppose so.” He told me that he could stop me because, due to war, they had all kinds of powers. I said, “Yes, I know but I hope you won’t do it.” He said, “No, if your Guru has told you to come, you must go. I do know that about India.” They could not find anybody locally to take up my work so they sent for a man from England. He came by air and after taking one look at the office he almost collapsed. He went to the Chief and said, “I don’t know how that man does it, but I can’t do it alone. It’s fantastic—thousands of letters handled in one day. I can’t manage it alone.” So they had to bring another Englishman in to help him. Thus two Englishmen ended up doing the work of one Indian, which is a good ratio, I think.

In Pondicherry we were given an Ashram house opposite the Sri Aurobindo Library. The Mother gave us the Golconde work [i.e. construction of Golconde, an Ashram guesthouse/residence eventually managed by Mona].



“I had seen eternity in a moment”

by Harald Fehrenbach

Based on an interview with Matthias of Auroville

I found Sri Aurobindo through Sri Chinmoy. In the late years of the 1980s and early 1990s I was a member of the Sri Chinmoy Center in Freiburg, where, towards the end of that stay, I wasn't really happy anymore. On a day a few weeks after I had left that behind me, in May 1996, I sat at home on a sofa-chair and thought about where things should go from there. On the table in front of me was placed Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, which had until then sat unread in my cupboard for about two years. I had read a few lines in it, but then closed the book. While I was sitting there, it seemed as if the sun was shining a little light through a window in the corner of the room, across my head—and suddenly the light seemed to move on its own. It slowly descended upon me, in front of me. I perceived a small, round, golden-yellow, subtle disk of light of maybe ten centimetres, which was moving towards the book. At that moment, as the light touched the book, it glistened in a golden splendour, like a golden sun. This was the key experience. I had seen eternity in a moment.

As I had a vision, I tried to follow it, and therefore read Sri Aurobindo's works. But the following years were quite sobering. I ascertained how difficult it was to read Sri Aurobindo. It



was an arduous process of labour for me. The problem didn't merely lie in the reading of the texts, but in the absorption of the consciousness that is contained in them, which made me feel great inner resistances. Only along the years, and when I added the writings of the Mother, it got better. Today I can't even imagine that it should be

Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's works are like a big treasure trove for me, with immeasurable, inexhaustible riches. They are a gift of God to humanity and a great fortune for mankind. At the same time, they are a signpost pointing towards a possible, even an imperative great future for humanity.

possible to read Sri Aurobindo without a parallel reading of the Mother's works. For me anyway, it seems impossible. The poems didn't play a major role yet.

Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's works are like a big treasure trove for me, with immeasurable, inexhaustible riches. They are a gift of God to humanity and a great fortune for mankind. At the same time, they are a signpost pointing towards a possible, even an imperative great future for humanity. Looking at the world with its contemporary challenges, Auroville, the experiment which attempts

to translate Sri Aurobindo's yoga and teachings into reality, is really a hope.

About 2007 the poems entered the picture. While on a walk, purely by coincidence, a few lines from “Invitation”, which I had read a few days before, went through my head. In that moment I suddenly realised, “Hey, I almost know it by heart!”. And that's how it started. I felt a deep inner joy to learn and repeat it over and over again, like a mantra. Sri Aurobindo wrote about mantric poetry. The vibration of words permeates my body, heart and soul and so gives me life-energy, which I need. A while ago I was also thinking of myself as an actor. Just like one would slip into a role, become one with it, so do I slip into the role of the poem and become one with it. For example, when I read the line “I am full of wounds and the fight merciless” (from “In the Battle”), I really

do feel in that moment as if I was indeed full of wounds and exposed to a merciless fight. Or take “To the Sea”. It seems to me as if I really stood directly in

front of a stormy sea. It's like a cinema showing inside of me. It's less a matter of mental learning and more a feeling into the poem.

If I have a favorite poem, it might be “A God's Labour”. It describes the pain, suffering and obstacles, also the loneliness, through which an Avatar (e.g. an incarnation of God) has to go, if he intends to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. Misunderstood he has to go his way, even if everything is against him; the Divine within him is his only support. With its 124 verses it is the longest poem I have memorized so far. In my own experience only a



few people I have around me in actual life understand something of this yoga. For most people you are a loon, and they do everything to prove one wrong. One couldn't possibly express it better than in that poem. As it is a long poem, here I will cite just the last eight lines, in which the Avatar finally reaches his goal:

A little more and the new life's
doors
Shall be carved in silver light
With its aureate roof and mosaic
floors
In a great world bare and bright.
I shall leave my dreams in their
argent air,
For in a raiment of
gold and blue
There shall move
on the earth
embodied and
fair
The living truth of
you.

At the moment I have memorized 57 poems. There is no set task for each month or year, also no particular poem that is next. It is something completely spontaneous. It is often like this: I am turning the pages in *Collected Poems*, catch on this or that poem if it appeals to me especially. Then I read it again and again, maybe the next day or in the following weeks a couple more times. Then, when I am at work or wherever during the day, the verses come as if by themselves out of nowhere. Sometimes these are magical moments. That is mostly my method: Repeating them often enough and then it just arrives eventually.

In the first three to four years I memorized only four or five poems. Then with time more and more were added to them. So far 2017 has been the peak year. By means of the

Auroville-project "Savitri around the World", which I participated in, it came about to recite the poems aloud as well. Before I had done so only silently for myself. Reciting aloud put me into an almost divinely ecstatic state, especially in the months from August to November of that year. In those four months I memorized more poems than usually. Everything went quickly. I was as if obsessed; I could call this time my "*Sturm-und-Drang*" phase.

I don't have a defined practice of Integral Yoga yet. I always do something to keep body and spirit in shape. This includes jogging, swimming, cycling, walking, the reading of Sri Au-

When I am for example at work or jogging, I am frequently reciting along in silence. At times it happens that I am so very much absorbed by it that I forget the material world around me. Of course, I have to be careful not to allow for any mistakes, although generally it works quite well.

robindo's and the Mother's works, silent meditation, etc. The poems play the lead, they are like mantras, which put me into a better state of consciousness. If you like one could call them my "practice of Integral Yoga". In any case the priority is the spontaneity, depending on the need of my inner being.

When I am for example at work or jogging, I am frequently reciting along in silence. At times it happens that I am so very much absorbed by it that I forget the material world around me. Of course, I have to be careful not to allow for any mistakes, although generally it works quite well. I am working with water pumps in a workshop and it's not a very demanding job for me. This really helps with the recitation. If I was working at a computer and my mind would be more engaged, the recitation, I believe, wouldn't be possible.

It is the most beautiful when I am going for a walk in the forest, most often on Sunday mornings. I sit down on a little bench and recite aloud. Nature, with its background sounds, provides an excellent setting for it. One should definitely be engaged with the heart, feel an inner joy in the heart, maybe even call the Mother for help.

Look at, for example, how the crowd of fans at a Rock'n'Roll concert full-throatedly sings along with the songs of their favorite band. They are enjoying it. When I was 16 years old, I was doing that as well. In principle, this is nothing different, aside from the fact that there it is happening on

a vital level, which is really far away from the sublime, subtle heights and spiritual depths of Sri Aurobindo.

It is a matter of letting things happen, not of doing. Also, I often have the

feeling that I do not choose the poems, but that they come to me. In the end I believe that everyone has to find their own way.

A divine Ananda, a delight interpretive, creative, revealing, formative,—one might almost say, an inverse reflection of the joy which the universal Soul has felt in its great release of energy when it rang out into the rhythmic forms of the universe the spiritual truth, the large interpretive idea, the life, the power, the emotion of things packed into its original creative vision—such spiritual joy is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in pouring also into all those who are prepared to receive it. (Sri Aurobindo, *The future poetry*, p. 27)



Essays

Involution and evolution

by Larry Seidlitz

In Sri Aurobindo's conception, the Divine is the One Being even while transcending, embracing and pervading the many existences in its manifestation. The undivine, the apparently divided existence with its ignorance, suffering, evil and death in which we live is in actuality a part of the oneness of the Divine Existence. Due to a self-limiting action of the Divine Consciousness this undivine existence is apparently cut off from its divine origins—not in reality, for the Divine still supports, pervades, and directs its movements—and in its limited consciousness the undivine exists obscurely, struggles to persist, and suffers. Sri Aurobindo posits that the manifestation of the Divine is reflected in a hierarchy of planes of consciousness, proceeding out of the transcendent Sachchidananda to the worlds of Sat, Chit, and Ananda, to the Supermind, to the spiritual mind planes intervening between Supermind and mind, and finally to the planes of mind, life, and matter with which we are most familiar. Our world is based in the material plane, but in this dense nescient material substance the other principles or planes of consciousness are involved, hidden deep within, but are gradually emerging and becoming integrated with the physical in the course of evolution. Life and Mind have already evolved on a global scale, and in individuals here and there higher levels of spiritual consciousness have emerged, a sign of



their future more general emergence. This essay will examine more specifically the processes of involution and evolution by which the One Divine becomes the many and the many recover their unity with the One.

Sachchidananda

It should first be emphasized that for Sri Aurobindo the transcendent Sachchidananda is ultimately the origin of the manifestation. Whereas Sachchidananda is pure undifferentiated Being, albeit absolutely conscious and blissful Being, the three features indistinguishably fused into one, it is not an empty void. All is there within it, but unexpressed, unmanifested. The manifestation derives from it, expresses in Time and Space, in form, in energy and movement, in subjectivity and objectivity, in relationship, in ordered and rhythmic process, that which is latent within it. The manifestation is not separated from it, different than it, imposed on it, but rather is itself in outward expression. This viewpoint grants to the manifestation a Reality that dominant Indian philosophies deny, and at the same time provides a philosophical basis for the meaningfulness of life, its sacredness, its orderly evolutionary process, and its possibility of divinization.

Supermind

In Sachchidananda there is no differentiation; the differentiation begins in Supermind, which in Sri Aurobindo's words "may be described as its power of self-awareness and world-awareness, the world being known as within itself and not outside" (*Letters on Yoga I*, p. 134). Again, it is worthwhile emphasizing that this implies that Supermind is not a separate entity from Sachchidananda, but for the sake of mental understanding, it is necessary to make such distinctions. Both undifferentiated Being and supramental self-awareness and world-awareness are simultaneous aspects and poises of the One Reality, which is not limited to either/or categories like the rational mind.

The differentiation which begins in Supermind is based firmly on the oneness of Sachchidananda. Within it are figured the potentialities which are latent in Sachchidananda, yet they remain a unity. There is a demarcation, not yet a division into separate existences, not yet a separation of them from their basis in Sachchidananda. Everything in Supermind is absolutely conscious of everything else; there is no gulf of unconsciousness between its differentiations.

It is a level of consciousness and being situated between the undifferentiated Sachchidananda and the divided consciousness and worlds of Mind, Life and Matter. As Sri Aurobindo describes it:

Between them is this comprehensive and creative consciousness, by its power of pervading and intimately comprehending knowledge the child of that self-awareness by identity which is the poise of the Brahman and by its power of projecting, confronting,



apprehending knowledge parent of that awareness by distinction which is the process of the mind. (*The Life Divine*, pp. 133-134).

He further states: "It has the knowledge of the One, but is able to draw out of the One its hidden multitudes; it manifests the Many, but does not lose itself in their differentiations" (*The Life Divine* p. 134). And further:

It possesses the power of development, of evolution, of making explicit, and that power carries with it the other power of involution, of envelopment, of making implicit. In a sense, the whole of creation may be said to be a movement between two involutions, Spirit in which all is involved and out of which all evolves downward to the other pole of Matter, Matter in which also all is involved and out of which all evolves upward to the other pole of Spirit. (*The Life Divine*, p. 137)

Sri Aurobindo explains that in Supermind, being, consciousness, and will are one:

Being gives the effect of substance, consciousness the effect of knowledge, of the self-guiding and shaping idea, of comprehension and apprehension; will gives the effect of self-fulfilling force. But the idea is only the light of the reality illumining itself; it is not mental thought nor imagination, but effective self-awareness. It is Real-Idea.... As the power of burning light is not different from the substance of fire, so the power of the Idea is not different from the substance of the Being which works itself out in the Idea

and its development. (*The Life Divine*, pp. 138-139)

The term "Real-Idea" conveys the notion that what Supermind sees as knowledge automatically becomes a substantive reality, that whatever unmanifest potentialities its knowledge sees in Sachchidananda, it consciously shapes and guides and develops them in its aspect of self-fulfilling force. The infinite potentialities are not brought out in a confusion or chaos, because the knowledge is all-comprehensive and one with the will, they are brought out in an organised, harmonious, and effective manifestation.

It is important to elaborate on the distinction between the comprehending consciousness and the apprehending consciousness that was alluded to in one of the quotations above. Sri Aurobindo describes the comprehending consciousness in the following: "an equal self-extension of Sachchidananda, all comprehending, all-possessing, all constituting ... all is held by this Divine Consciousness as forms of its existences, not as in any degree separate existences" (*The Life Divine*, p. 156). In contrast, in the apprehending consciousness, "the Divine Consciousness stands back in the idea from the movement which it contains, realising it by a sort of apprehending consciousness, following it, occupying and inhabiting its works, seeming to distribute itself in its forms" (*The Life Divine*, p. 157).

In this second poise there is the differentiation into subject and object, the consciousness looking at itself as object, though still knowing the object as one with itself, an identification which is lost in mind. It is this differentiation which originates and supports the mind's hard division into subject and object, which in turn is a fundamental support of the mind's ignorance. Moreover, by following, oc-

cupying and inhabiting its objective manifestations, this apprehending consciousness of Supermind distributes itself in its forms. Sri Aurobindo explains that it is in this poise that the individual Divine takes form:

This concentration supporting the soul-form would be the individual Divine or Jivatman as distinguished from the universal Divine or one all-constituting self. There would be no essential difference, but only a practical differentiation for the play which would not abrogate the real unity. (*The Life Divine*, p. 157)

It is this aspect of the Supermind that gives a fundamental reality and divine status to individual existences, and is the origin, base and support of our individual soul existence here in the lower manifestation of mind, life, and matter in the ignorance. This individual divine Self, the Jivatman, has not lost its conscious unity with the universal Divine, the Atman, which stands behind and supports it, but its consciousness is turned towards the particular soul-form which it is inhabiting. Here in the lower manifestation we can recover our conscious unity with the Jivatman and the Atman, because they are the divine supports of our existence here.

Sri Aurobindo posits a third poise of the supramental consciousness which is still further turned towards the multiplicity than the apprehending consciousness described above. It is similar in most respects, the main difference being that instead of a part of the consciousness standing back subjectively from the movement and observing it as object, this subjective aspect also projects itself into the movement. The unity would not be entirely lost, but the consciousness



would further stress the differentiating movement and make that the field of its operation in which it is poised as an individual center, and would put the consciousness of unity further into the background. This latter poise is of course a precursor to the fall into ignorance in which the underlying consciousness of unity is lost.

Overmind

In the turn of the divine consciousness from oneness towards multiplicity, Sri Aurobindo described yet another transitional level which he called Overmind. He says of it, "In its nature and law the Overmind is a delegate of the Supermind Consciousness, its delegate to the Ignorance" (*The Life Divine*, p. 293). It acts as a kind of protective screen shielding mind and the ignorance from the supreme Light of the Supermind, and as a diffusing medium of the Supermind in which its realities are transmitted into Overmind, but across a border in which the integrality of awareness held in Supermind is lost.

Furthermore, Overmind is a dynamic center or medium of differentiated and separative creativity. Sri Aurobindo describes this aspect:

Overmind Energy proceeds through an illimitable capacity of separation and combination of the powers and aspects of the integral and indivisible all-comprehending Unity. It takes each Aspect or Power and gives to it an independent action in which it acquires a full separate importance and is able to work out, we might say, its own world of creation. (*The Life Divine*, p. 293)

It takes the one Existence and turns it into innumerable existences,

it takes the one Consciousness and turns it into many independent forms of consciousness, it takes the infinite Delight of the One and turns it into all manner of delights. Sri Aurobindo adds, however,

At the same time in Overmind this separateness is still founded on the basis of an implicit underlying unity; all possibilities of combination and relation between the separated Powers and Aspects, all interchanges and mutualities of their energies are freely organised and their actuality always possible. (*The Life Divine*, p. 294)

In other words, all variations are still held in a single harmony.

Sri Aurobindo stresses its aspect of world creation. Teeming possibilities in Overmind are turned into different worlds each founded or based on the particular principles whose individual variations are brought out into actualities in that world. He says,

Overmind thus gives to the One Existence-Consciousness-Bliss the character of a teeming of infinite possibilities which can be developed into a multitude of worlds or thrown together into one world in which the endlessly variable outcome of their play is the determinant of the creation, of its process, its course of development. (*The Life Divine*, p. 295)

The Overmind plane has also been described as the plane of the gods, and he appears to describe it as such here: "If we regard the Powers of the Reality as so many Godheads, we can say that the Overmind releases a million Godheads into action, each empowered to create its own world, each world ca-

pable of relation, communication and interplay with the others" (*The Life Divine*, p. 294).

We assert again, however, that these teeming worlds are still worlds of the Overmind plane, worlds still having a basis of truth and harmony, not of ignorance and conflict and falsehood such as we see in our own world. Sri Aurobindo says:

The Overmind is a creator of truths, not of illusions or falsehood: what is worked out in any given overmental energism or movement is the truth of the Aspect, Power, Idea, Force, Delight which is liberated into independent action, the truth of the consequences of its reality in that independence. (*The Life Divine*, p. 297).

But he adds,

And still we can recognise at once in the Overmind ... a Power which has made the Ignorance possible, even inevitable. For if each principle loosed into action must follow its independent line and carry out its complete consequences, the principle of separation must also be allowed its complete course and arrive at its absolute consequence; this is the inevitable descent, *facilis descensus*, which Consciousness, once it admits the separative principle, follows till it enters by obscuring infinitesimal fragmentation, *tucchyena*, into the material Inconscience... (*The Life Divine*, p. 299)

Nevertheless, in this Overmind plane the many individualities and powers and ideas that are given expression know the others and they



know both themselves and others as different expressions of the One. They keep their place in the whole and do not deny to others their truth and rightful place.

Mind

Sri Aurobindo explains that in the descent of consciousness through Overmind a line is reached which separates the cosmic Truth from the cosmic Ignorance, and in crossing this line there is a separation of Mind from its overmental source. There is an exclusive concentration of the consciousness emphasizing the separateness of each independent movement from Overmind and obscuring its underlying unity with others. Sri Aurobindo states that at this level “Mind separated acts as if it were an independent principle, and each mental being, each basic mental idea, power, force stands similarly on its separate self...” (*The Life Divine*, p. 301). This mind energy operates on the basis of the Ignorance and its divisions, its actions have a certain knowledge, but not a true integral self-knowledge or world-knowledge.

This Mind in its descent from Overmind has a greater mental power than our human mind; it is not obscured and falsified like our human mind by the blind forces of Life and the dense inconscience of Matter. Our human mind has developed out of the evolution from Matter and carries that inconscient burden, but this Mind has been created in the descent of consciousness from Overmind. There is a freer play of intelligence, and a closer interchange and more direct communication with other minds, other ideas. Sri Aurobindo says that it is a plane of Ignorance, but not yet of falsehood and error. There is a limitation of knowledge, the separate mental beings and ideas and forces express

partial truths but not falsehoods, and there is a greater harmony and organization among them. There is not yet the hard division between them that is created by the further lapse of consciousness into the inconscient and the infinitesimals of Matter. Our own inner mind, which stands behind our surface mentality and may send intimations to the latter, has this same character and comes from it and can consciously open to it and unite with it, though this usually occurs only as the result of a long spiritual discipline and practice.

Life

In the further descent and separation of consciousness the principles of Life and Matter derive from Mind, and from the higher levels of consciousness above Mind and working in it that are the source of Mind, Life, and Matter. In other words, consciousness becomes further differentiated, further separated into distinct movements of its force and will, increasingly oblivious of their conscious Source. Sri Aurobindo indicates that what we call Life is Mind manifested in a specialization of Force (*The Life Divine*, p. 188). He also indicates that “material Force is only energy-form of Mind ... in fact, a subconscious operation of Will...” (*The Life Divine*, p. 186). But he also reminds us that “wherever Mind is, there Supermind must be. Supermind or the Truth-consciousness is the real creative agency of the universal Existence” (*The Life Divine*, p. 186). He notes that it is due to the presence of Supermind that Mind, even in its darkened consciousness separated from its source, yet maintains in its further specialized energies of Life and Matter a world of law and order and not mere chaos. In other words, we could say that Life and Matter are the divine Will

working out through the Mind’s modes of life energy and material energy what the divine Consciousness sees as potentialities in its own being.

Mind is a crucial medium in this working because it is the separating agent: it separates these movements of force from conscious awareness of their source and from each other, enabling a multiplicity of forces and forms to act and interact as if separate from each other, at least from their own perspective. The life energies and material energies work subconsciously, unaware or only obscurely aware of their activities. This separation at the same time allows that these separate forces and forms have an apparent incapacity and weakness, as they seem to struggle as individualized forces in competition with other individualized forces within the universal matrix in which they find themselves. This weakness is more apparent than real, as it is in reality a conscious holding back and dispersion of infinite Force by the one divine Being according to its own Will, but to semi-conscious individual beings embodying this life force it seems to be limitation. Moreover, the competition of individualized forces and beings work out a harmony, as do notes and rhythms jostling in a musical composition.

What is perhaps the most important takeaway from this explanation is that there is one single divine Energy working throughout all existence, from the heights of spiritual consciousness to the densest physical substance. The degree of self-consciousness of this working determines whether we call it material energy, life energy, mental energy, or spiritual energy, but there are no sharp divisions between these grades.

At the same time, the lower grades of energy of Mind, Life and Matter represent in the ignorance different strands of the apparently separated



spiritual energy. It has been previously noted that in the transcendent Sachchidananda, Sat, Chit, and Ananda are fused in a single unity. However, in Supermind these three aspects are differentiated, though are not separated. In the lower grades of Mind, Life, and Matter, the fundamental aspects of spiritual existence are differentially represented. Specifically, Sri Aurobindo indicates that Mind is a derivation of Supermind, Life is a derivation of the Chit or Consciousness-Force aspect of Sachchidananda, and Matter is a derivation of the Sat or Existence aspect (*The Life Divine*, p. 278). Even at the lower levels of existence, all aspects of the Spirit are inherent, but one or another may be said to be more prominent. Sri Aurobindo indicates that the Ananda aspect is represented in the lower nature particularly by the psychic entity, the individualized soul element that gradually evolves through successive lives towards conscious reunification with the Divine, and in the evolutionary process develops and organizes mind, life and body around it.

The Life plane is characterized by apparently separated beings animated by vital energy, and interacting with other living beings in a collective existence, an organized world or habitat consisting of numerous similar types of beings in interaction with each other. Their interaction involves a continuous interchange of life energies, a constant inflow and outflow of energy. Deriving from the Consciousness-Force aspect of Sachchidananda, life emphasizes conscious-force, but the relative balance of consciousness versus force varies across the different strata of life existence. That is, at the higher levels of life-existence the life

energies have greater consciousness and self-awareness and at the lower levels they have less consciousness and operate more instinctively.

As the beings embodying these life energies are individualized, separated from each other and from their world existence according to their own perspective, their limited status requires this interchange of energy with the world around them. It is translated in their own experience as need and desire to take into themselves energies from their environment as well as to expend surplus energy through interaction with others. Whereas Mind is characterized more by conscious awareness and conscious will or focus of mental energy towards particular mental aims, Life is characterized

Sri Aurobindo describes a hierarchy of worlds and planes of existence ranging from the highest heavens to the deepest hells of our subconscious and inconscient base.

more by a semi-conscious or subconscious exchange of forces.

In the involutionary descent of consciousness from Mind through the various strata of the Life plane towards Matter, there are many rungs or planes of existence that are characterized by decreasing levels of conscious awareness. That is, mental consciousness and energy which are predominant in the mental planes of existence become less and less self-aware in the vital life planes of existence, become increasingly narrowly focused and carried along in the movement of the life forces and their striving for satisfaction of need and desire and expansion of power and life-space. These planes of existence are organized in a hierarchy from more self-aware to less self-aware and finally descend into unconscious material force and substance. Associated with these planes

are many worlds or organized habitats of individualized living beings operating roughly at the same level of consciousness and interacting with each other. Throughout this complex series of planes and worlds, the Supermind works through the medium of Mind, creating and driving and maintaining their diverse play of energies and their organization.

The worlds in *Savitri*

Whereas *The Life Divine* presents Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in logical analytical prose, though from an intuitive and even revelatory perspective, his epic poem *Savitri* illustrates the same philosophy in a story of nearly 24000 lines of vivid, picturesque mantric blank verse. It is comprised of three parts, 12 books and 48 cantos, each canto like

a chapter of the poem. In Book 2, by far the longest book in the poem and called The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, Sri Aurobindo describes a hierarchy of worlds and planes of existence ranging from the highest heavens to the deepest hells of our subconscious and inconscient base. Other books elaborate on the lowest and highest of these worlds, most notably Book 9, the Book of Eternal Night, and Book 11, The Book of Everlasting Day. In the first canto of Book 2 is presented an introduction to a master yogi's inner journey through these domains of consciousness, which is clearly based on the poet-seer's own inner exploration. There he describes a vision of this series of worlds as if piled one on top of the other:

As if from Matter's plinth and
viewless base



To a top as viewless, a carved sea
of worlds
Climbing with foam-maned
waves to the Supreme
Ascended towards breadths im-
measurable;
It hoped to soar into the Ineffa-
ble's reign:
A hundred levels raised it to the
Unknown. (*Savitri*, p. 98)

A heaven of creative truths above,
A cosmos of harmonious dreams
between,
A chaos of dissolving forms
below,
It plunges lost in our inconscient
base.
Out of its fall our denser Matter
came. (*Savitri*, p. 107)

In the succeeding cantos of Book 2, Sri Aurobindo takes the reader along on this journey of consciousness, step by step, canto by canto, through this series of worlds, depicting their landscapes, habitats, beings, characteristic activities, moods, and scenes.

In these descriptions it becomes evident that these worlds with their beings and activities and scenes are reflected in our own world, have made inroads into our own consciousness and our own lives. And it is not that they are merely poetic symbols of realities here, Sri Aurobindo makes that clear in his philosophical statements and his comments on the poem, it is more the case that our own world is a representation or imprint of these prior worlds in the involutionary descent of consciousness into a denser material substance. The doors of our inner consciousness, hidden from own view that is usually turned outward, are open to their influence.

These are worlds that are parallel to our own, not based in Matter like our own, but having their own

subtle physical density giving a more changeable form and shape to their own characteristic energies and beings. While parallel to our world, they are not completely independent of it. We can access them through our inner consciousness, and their beings can access our world and exert a subtle influence on our consciousness and on our actions. The principles and powers of these worlds all have their parts to play in our world. Whereas the beings of each world are principally focused on the activities of their own world, there is a subtle interaction and influence between worlds that also takes place. Indeed it through this influence that the lower worlds have been created, and in the evolutionary ascent of consciousness occurring in our own world the higher planes of existence help to draw out the higher possibilities that are inherent within Matter and material life and with difficulty are gradually emerging.

Matter

Our world of dense physical Matter has been created in the descent of consciousness from Supermind through Mind and Life into inconscient material Force. Sri Aurobindo refers to the lower base of existence as the Inconscient, an apparent absence of consciousness which yet conceals within itself Supermind, which works within it but hidden from its own view due to its own unconsciousness. Nevertheless Supermind organizes and drives its apparently unconscious action. Sri Aurobindo conceives of the Inconscient as even lower in the scale of consciousness than Matter, which at least has a certain organization and lawful process associated with it, and that Matter has gradually developed out of the Inconscient. Nevertheless, for practical purposes there is little difference

and Matter is sometimes referred to as inconscient. It is due to this hidden or involved supramental consciousness that the material universe is organized, does not dissolve into a chaos of conflicting energies, and instead evolves towards an increasingly organized and more conscious existence.

In Matter, consciousness is lost in the movement of material Force. Consciousness and Force can be viewed as two ends of a continuum, and pure Force can be viewed as the working of Consciousness. In effect, Force is Consciousness exerting its Will and expressing its possibilities in energy and substance. All of existence is an unbroken chain of Being with pure infinite, blissful Consciousness at one end and unconscious material form and Force at the other, with an infinite diversity of intermediate planes and worlds ranging from fully self-aware to dimly subconscious in between. Still, Matter can be said to reflect or emphasize the Sat or infinite Existence aspect of Sachchidananda in the lower nature. However, whereas infinite Existence in Sachchidananda is fused with infinite Consciousness and Bliss, Existence as it is reflected in Matter through the dividing medium of Mind is devoid of conscious awareness and insensible. Nevertheless, Consciousness, Bliss, and Supermind are not entirely absent, they uphold Matter and organize and direct its material Force. They may be said to be involved within its unconscious movement of energy, hidden from its surface being, holding back their greater possibilities, but nevertheless active. Moreover, through the long aeonic process of evolution they are reemerging from its hidden depths to the surface. In that evolutionary process, Matter itself is gradually transformed; it becomes alive, self-aware, and eventually will become spiritually and infinitely self-



aware and blissful in a conscious reunification with Sachchidananda.

Evolution

As the lower base of the evolutionary growth of consciousness, Matter provides a stable, solid habitat, a ground on which that evolution may occur. It is true, of course, that Matter in its reality is not what it seems to our senses, that it is not really solid and stable. When viewed in its smallest, most disaggregated particles it seems even to dissolve into pure waves of energy, and according to some recent theories of quantum mechanics, into consciousness, for consciousness seems to be a determinant of whether matter displays the properties of energy waves or of physical particles. These matters can be left to the physicists, for our present practical purposes we can see that the physical planet earth, which according to scientists is approximately 4.5 billion years old (this and the following figures have been taken from Wikipedia), has been the scene of an evolution of living organisms ranging from the very simple to human beings. It appears that about 400 million years were needed for the emergence of simple microbes on planet earth, and about four billion years were needed to establish more complex plants and animals. Our first primate ancestors seem to have appeared around 100 million years ago, and Homo Sapiens emerged only during the last million years, perhaps about 300,000 years ago. This indicates that there was a very slow, protracted emergence of complex life forms, but a relatively faster development with the emergence of animals and then humans. This timeline suggests that material earth has provided a temporally stable habitat for the evolution of life, extending over billions of years, and

that life evolved at first very slowly out of the dense unconsciousness of Matter, but that the more that Life freed itself from the unconscious inertia of material Force, when it began to move more freely, its evolution and development accelerated. With the emergence of Mind in human beings from the instinct-driven Life of animals, this accelerated development has increased tremendously. One may debate about whether humans today are wiser than the first humans, but the growth in knowledge and the swift transformation of the kind of life they lead and of the planet as a whole are indisputable.

The material basis of Life on earth has made for a fairly clear demarcation between individual living beings. Individual cells divide and become two, and then four. Plants disperse seeds which sprout into other individual plants. Animals copulate and produce individual offspring. There are exceptions to the rule, for example, the same root system may sprout seemingly different individual plants or trees, and even in humans there are conjoined twins. But in general, while living beings share the same ecological environment and thus live in dynamic interaction and co-existence with others, Matter provides a fairly stable and demarcated individual existence. Material life, we could say, has both individual and common aspects. Each individual is part of a family, which is part of a larger family, which is part of the total life on earth. Still, it is the individuality that seems to provide an essential condition for evolution. From the scientific viewpoint, evolution occurs due to genetic variations that occur in particular individuals which are favourable for survival and reproduction in their particular environment. These variations then establish themselves in the population. From the spiritual viewpoint of

Sri Aurobindo, evolution occurs due to the pressure of the hidden latent consciousness in individual beings, as well as to the pressure of the higher levels of consciousness pressing for manifestation on earth. These pressures of consciousness also influence the wider species and not only particular individuals, but the pressures break through in particular individuals towards new developments and only afterwards spread more widely in the population.

Thus an important difference of Sri Aurobindo's perspective on evolution from that of the scientific explanation is that in his view the higher planes of existence already have established particular gradations and types of living beings and energies which press for their manifestation on earth under its material conditions; in the scientific view there is only an inconscient material process of random events and biological mutations which may or may not be favourable for survival. It would seem doubtful that random, because inconscient, processes could produce a world of exceedingly complex, intricate order and organization, beauty, intelligence, and the highest virtues and values so far displayed by human beings, but that is science's problem to adequately explain. The emergence of such qualities out of a material matrix in which they are already involved, emerging in response to an influence from above the material plane in which they are already existent and outwardly expressed seems easier to understand and accept. In Sri Aurobindo's view, these qualities are inherent in the infinite One Existent who is all-conscious, all-powerful, and all-blissful. They are manifesting here in this material world gradually over time for the delight of manifestation.

Still, in Sri Aurobindo's perspective, the material base with its Inconscient foundation has a real and for-



midable resistance to the emergence of consciousness. He does not dispute that it has taken billions of years to evolve plants and animals in this material matrix. The lower species with a more rudimentary consciousness evolve higher species with a slightly less rudimentary consciousness. The evolution proceeds step by step, through gradual widenings and heightenings of consciousness, though sometimes the characteristic small steps may lead to leaps or bounds. A form may be gradually prepared in increments, and then a new type of being may suddenly emerge in the ready receptacle. This seems to be the case in the development of various primates, until there was a sudden appearance of a human being with an intelligence that could deliberately think and reflect on its environment. This new being then becomes generalized and established as a species.

The close linkage of Matter, Life and Mind is crucial to the evolutionary process. Life emerges only in a form of Matter that has been sufficiently developed, complexified, and organized. The embodied living being then reproduces its form, providing a duplicate physical form suitable for habitation by another living being of the same type. The material form circumscribes the possibilities of the living being. Only as the form develops greater complexity, organization, and elasticity can a more developed living being emerge within it. Similarly, the development of Mind is circumscribed by the material form and the sophistication and complexity of the living being housed within the form. The principle of Mind is already hidden in the material form, but it begins to emerge more clearly in its characteristic action in living animals, many of which display a mental activity that is still largely curtailed by the instinctual and vital drives characteristic of

Life. There emerges a mental action that operates in the service of the still dominant life instincts and drives. There is cunning and some degree of deliberation, but not yet a clearly disengaged mental reflection upon events and circumstances. Human beings seem to be the species most clearly mental in their nature, though there appears to be a fairly high degree of mental understanding, skill, and communication in a few other higher species of animals. But human beings, with the sophisticated development of the human brain, and the long, deliberate, and elaborate training of the life energies and mental faculties, appear to carry the mantle of the evolutionary advance on earth. And it is a primary endeavor of the human being to develop the mental faculties to the degree that they can disengage themselves from the life instincts and drives, to look upon existence, the world, and oneself in a clear, objective way, to understand, reflect upon, and exert a conscious and deliberate will-power over oneself and one's actions in line with one's highest understanding.

One of the most troubling aspects of the evolution for humanity is the immixture of the vital drives and desires into the Mind and its resultant perversion. At their own level, animal drives are fairly simple and narrowly directed, but when equipped with a powerful intellect and imagination, they can become much wider in scope, insatiable, and dangerous. It is surely a major cause of the crises humanity faces today. This is evidently a difficult passage that must be traversed in the evolutionary ascent until the Mind can sufficiently disengage itself from this usurpation of its superior powers by the unenlightened and blindly-driven passions of the vital nature. The mental being must learn to stand back from the vital nature's tendency to throw itself into action to satisfy its

desires rather than feed those desires with its abilities to imagine infinite possibilities and plan and execute actions to achieve them. Its higher purpose and function is to seek for the truest truth that it can discover, and to put into luminous and harmonious order its life and surroundings and align them with that truth. Calmly it must look at its field of possibilities and select those for action that its reason and intelligence, its higher values of truth, justice, goodness, and beauty indicate. At its heights, controlled and concentrated, it can open itself to a higher intuition and knowledge from higher planes of consciousness of which it is an instrument. Put at the service of this higher consciousness it can become an effective agent for the manifestation of the higher possibilities of the evolutionary ascent.

Whereas the scientific view of evolution focuses on the development of new and more complex species, from the spiritual point of view one may also consider the evolution of consciousness within the human being. Clearly human beings greatly vary in the level of development of their consciousness. Some appear similar to animals, their interests and concerns are predominantly associated with meeting the needs of survival and the cares and concerns of reproduction and the raising of their young; others are more situated in mental activities, in developing greater knowledge and skill and mastery of themselves and the world around them; and in perhaps a relatively small number, there is a primary concern with spirituality, with developing a deeper inner connection with the universal and transcendent existence in which they find themselves. Some even seem to have achieved some stable realization of unity with the One divine Being. Thus, there is still a wide arc of development



to traverse once evolution has reached the human stage in order to reach the point at which it can finally leap into the higher spiritual consciousness, and perhaps be a forerunner of a new divine species of beings on earth.

Evolution of the soul

The discussion of the process of evolution up to this point has focused on the outer development of Matter, Life, and Mind, and a reaching towards the spiritual consciousness. What has not been brought out clearly is that according to Sri Aurobindo's view the evolution proceeds through individuals and not simply at the species level. Individuals evolve, but since individuals cannot traverse the whole arc of

evolution in a single lifetime, it is the individual soul that evolves through a

succession of earthly lives, keeping the gains made in one lifetime to the next. The soul is the divine element in the individual; we could say it is the Spirit that has involved itself in Matter and is gradually evolving in a succession of living forms until it can consciously reunite in a living body with its origin of Sachchidananda. The universal level is too broad to evolve as a single block, but that is also not the point, because the universe provides the relatively stable habitat in which individual centers of consciousness can live and interact with each other and enjoy the variation of their differing perspectives on the world, the universe, and the One Reality. That is at least one important point of the manifestation of the one Divine in the multiplicity of existence. At the same time, the individual provides a concentrated point in which the long

trajectory of evolution can occur. The nature of the soul and its process of development and evolution is sufficiently complex to require a separate essay, but a brief explanation is necessary here to provide a more complete picture of evolution.

Earlier in this essay when discussing involution at the level of Supermind, it was mentioned that the comprehending consciousness of Supermind gives rise to an apprehending consciousness which distributes itself in its forms, and that this concentration of consciousness in the form is the soul-form or Jivatman. It is an individualized portion of the divine consciousness. At that supramental level, the Jivatman does not lose its awareness of the One when distribut-

The soul is the divine element in the individual; we could say it is the Spirit that has involved itself in Matter and is gradually evolving in a succession of living forms until it can consciously reunite in a living body with its origin of Sachchidananda.

ing itself into a particular idea or form, but it is such a being, the individualized Jivatman, which supports the evolution of each individual soul in the evolution on earth. The soul may be said to be its emanation, a kind of divine spark in the material form. This spark is eternal, it survives the changes and developments of the material form; it persists through the life and death of the body, life, and mind. It is the divine soul that evolves on earth, growing in consciousness, force, and delight, expanding its existence. When the body dies, the soul withdraws for a time into the subtle worlds created in the involution and then enters a new physical body on earth to carry on its evolution. The Jivatman from the supramental plane supports and guides the evolution of the soul that descends into the manifestation in Matter.

As the soul evolves through a succession of living beings, evolving its consciousness wider and higher, it exerts more and more control over the succession of living beings that it inhabits. It more powerfully organizes the materials and character of the body and the energies and activities and events of the life around its individualized will and the qualities that it wishes to express in manifestation. By the time the evolution of the soul reaches the human stage, it has developed to a point at which it has a kind of soul-form and soul-personality, and this is called in Sri Aurobindo's terminology the psychic being. The psychic being continues its evolution through a succession of human lives, growing in its consciousness, growing in its

control over the outer life of the individual and its events, organizing the life of the

person more and more towards the development of the qualities it wishes to manifest. Nevertheless, its existence and its influence are generally unknown to the surface consciousness of the person; its action is subtle and undetected. Its existence is veiled by the activities of the outer mind, life and body. It is only when it has gained a sufficient strength and development and can subtly influence or direct the person towards the conscious pursuit of spiritual development that it can finally come out into the front of person's outer consciousness and take the outer life of the individual consciously and willingly into its control and direction. This is called the psychic transformation in Sri Aurobindo's yoga, and it sets the stage for the development of higher spiritual realizations and transformations.



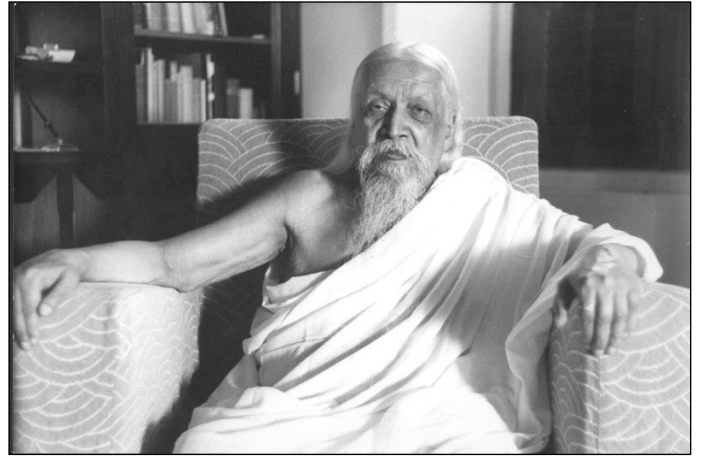
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Involution and evolution

by Sri Aurobindo

An evolutionary process must be by the very terms of the problem to be solved a development, in some first established basic principle of being or substance, of something that that basic principle holds involved in itself or else admits from outside itself and modifies by the admission; for it must necessarily modify by its own law of nature all that enters into it and is not already part of its own nature. This must be so even if it is a creative evolution in the sense of manifesting always new powers of existence that are not native to the first foundation but introduced into it, accepted into an original substance. If, on the contrary, there is already there in involution,—present in the first foundation, but not yet manifested or not yet organised,—the new principle or power of existence that has to be evolved, then, when it appears, it will still have to accept modification by the nature and law of the basic substance: but also it will modify that substance by its own power, its own law of nature. If, further, it is aided by a descent of its own principle already established in its own full force above the field of evolution and pressing down into that field to possess it, then the new power may even establish itself as a dominant element and considerably or radically change the consciousness and action of the world in which it emerges or into which it enters. But its force to modify or change or to revolutionise the law and working of the original substance chosen as the evolutionary matrix will depend upon its own essential potency. It is not likely that it will be able to bring about an entire transformation if it is not itself the original Principle of Existence, if it is only derivative, an instrumental power and not the first puissance.

Here the evolution takes place in a material universe; the foundation, the original substance, the first established all-conditioning status of things is Matter. Mind and Life are evolved in Matter, but they are limited and modified in their action by the obligation to use its substance for their instrumentation and by their subjection to the law of material Nature even while they modify what they undergo and use. For they do transform its substance, first into living substance and then into conscious substance; they succeed in changing its inertia, immobility and inconscience into a movement of consciousness, feeling and life. But



they do not succeed in transforming it altogether; they cannot make it altogether alive or altogether conscious: life-nature evolving is bound to death; mind evolving is materialised as well as vitalised; it finds itself rooted in inconscience, limited by ignorance; it is moved by uncontrolled life-forces which drive and use it, it is mechanised by the physical forces on which it has to depend for its own self-expression. This is a sign that neither Mind nor Life is the original creative Power; they, like Matter, are intermediaries, successive and seried instruments of the evolutionary process. If a material energy is not that original Power, then we must seek for it in something above Mind or Life; there must be a deeper occult Reality which has yet to disclose itself in Nature. An original creative or evolutionary Power there must be: but, although Matter is the first substance, the original and ultimate Power is not an inconscient material Energy; for then life and consciousness would be absent, since Inconscience cannot evolve consciousness nor an inanimate Force evolve life. There must be, therefore, since Mind and Life also are not that, a secret Consciousness greater than Life Consciousness or Mind Consciousness, an Energy more essential than the material Energy. Since it is greater than Mind, it must be a supramental Consciousness-Force; since it is a power of essential substance other than Matter, it must be the power of that which is the supreme essence and substance of all things, a power of the Spirit. There is a creative energy of Mind and a creative Life Force, but they are instrumental and partial, not original and decisive: Mind and Life do indeed modify the material substance they inhabit and its energies and are not merely determined by them, but the extent and way of this mutual modification and determination are fixed by the inhabitant and all-containing Spirit through a secret indwelling light and force of supermind, an occult gnosis,—an invisible self-knowledge and all-



knowledge. If there is to be an entire transformation, it can only be by the full emergence of the law of the spirit; its power of supermind or gnosis must have entered into Matter and it must evolve in Matter. It must change the mental into the supramental being, make the inconscient in us conscious, spiritualise our material substance, erect its law of gnostic consciousness in our whole evolutionary being and nature. This must be the culminating emergence or, at least, that stage in the emergence which first decisively changes the nature of the evolution by transforming its action of Ignorance and its basis of Inconscience.

This movement of evolution, of a progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit in a material universe, has to make its account at every step with the fact of the involution of consciousness and force in the form and activity of material substance. For it proceeds by an awakening of the involved consciousness and force and its ascent from principle to principle, from grade to grade, from power to power of the secret Spirit, but this is not a free transference to a higher status. The law of action, the force of action of each grade or power in its emergence is determined, not by its own free, full and pure law of nature or vim of energy, but partly by the material organisation provided for it and partly by its own status, achieved degree, accomplished fact of consciousness which it has been able to impose upon Matter. Its effectivity is in some sort made up of a balance between the actual extent of this evolutionary emergence and the countervailing extent to which the emergent power is still enveloped, penetrated, diminished by the domination and continuing grip of the Inconscience. Mind as we see it is not mind pure and free, but mind clouded and diminished by an enveloping nescience, mind labouring and struggling to deliver knowledge out of that nescience. All depends upon the more or less involved or more or less evolved condition of consciousness,—quite involved in inconscient matter, hesitating on the verge between involution and conscious evolution in the first or non-animal forms of life in matter, consciously evolving but greatly limited and hampered in mind housed in a living body, destined to be fully evolved by the awakening of the supermind in the embodied mental being and nature.

To each grade in this series achieved by the evolving Consciousness belongs its appropriate class of existences,—one by one there appear material forms and forces, vegetable life, animals and half-animal man, developed human beings, imperfectly evolved or more evolved spiritual beings: but because of the continuity of the evolutionary process there is no rigid separation between them; each new advance or formation takes up what was before. The animal takes up into himself living and inanimate Matter; man takes up both

along with the animal existence. There are furrows left by the transitional process or separating demarcations settled by the fixed habit of Nature: but these distinguish one series from another, serve perhaps to prevent a fall back of what has been evolved, they do not cancel or cut the continuity of the evolution. The evolving Consciousness passes from one grade to another or from one series of steps to another either by an imperceptible process or by some bound or crisis or, perhaps, by an intervention from above,—some descent or ensouling or influence from higher planes of Nature. But, by whatever means, the Consciousness secretly indwelling in matter, the occult Inhabitant, is able thus to make its way upward from the lower to the higher gradations, taking up what it was into what it is and preparing to take up both into what it will be. Thus, having first laid down a basis of material being, material forms, forces, existences in which it seems to be lying inconscient, though in reality, as we know now, always subconsciously at work, it is able to manifest life and living beings, to manifest mind and mental beings in a material world, and must therefore be able to manifest there supermind also and supramental beings. Thus has come about the present status of the evolution of which man is the now apparent culmination but not the real ultimate summit; for he is himself a transitional being and stands at the turning-point of the whole movement. Evolution, being thus continuous, must have at any given moment a past with its fundamental results still in evidence, a present in which the results it is labouring over are in process of becoming, a future in which still unevolved powers and forms of being must appear till there is the full and perfect manifestation. The past has been the history of a slow and difficult sub-conscious working with effects on the surface,—it has been an unconscious evolution; the present is a middle stage, an uncertain spiral in which the human intelligence is used by the secret evolutionary Force of being and participates in its action without being fully taken into confidence,—it is an evolution slowly becoming conscious of itself; the future must be a more and more conscious evolution of the spiritual being until it is fully delivered into a self-aware action by the emergent gnostic principle. (*The Life Divine*, pp. 732-736)

The Creation has descended all the degrees of being from the Supermind to Matter and in each degree it has created a world, reign, plane or order proper to that degree. In the creating of the material world there was a plunge of this descending Consciousness into an apparent Inconscience and an emergence of it out of that Inconscience, degree by degree, until it recovers its own highest spiritual and supramental summits and manifests their powers here in Matter. (*Letters on Yoga I*, pp. 265-266)



Sri Aurobindo's conception of involution and evolution

by the Mother

Mother begins the reading of the last six chapters of *The Life Divine*.

"A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter in a constant developing self-formation till the form can reveal the indwelling Spirit, is then the keynote, the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence. This significance is concealed at the outset by the involution of the Spirit, the Divine Reality, in a dense material Inconscience; a veil of Inconscience, a veil of insensibility of Matter hides the universal Consciousness Force which works within it, so that the Energy, which is the first form the Force of creation assumes in the physical universe, appears to be itself inconscient and yet does the works of a vast occult Intelligence."

The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 824

I didn't understand, Sweet Mother, what this Consciousness-Force was, so I did not understand anything!

The first thing to understand is precisely this first sentence which states the fact, the *raison d'être* and the very principle of universal existence. You see, we are beginning here at the end of the volume, these are the last six chapters. Throughout the beginning of the book Sri Aurobindo has taken one after another all the theories explaining the how and why of the universe and of existence; he has carried them to their extreme limits in order to explain fully what they mean, and at the end he has shown how far they were incomplete or imperfect and given the true solution. All that is, as it were, finished with; it lies behind our reading. It would have taken us something like ten years to go through all that! And you would have required all kinds of knowledge and a great intellectual development to be able to follow it with any profit. But for our part, we are beginning from where he has shown, from the purely intellectual point of view, what the purpose of existence is, and he formulates it like this: "the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence." For he is not concerned with the entire universe, he has taken terrestrial life, that is, our life here on Earth, as a symbolic and concentrated representation of the purpose of the entire universe. In fact, according to very old traditions, the Earth, from the deeper spiritual



point of view, has been created as a symbolic concentration of universal life so that the work of transformation may be done more easily, in a limited, concentrated "space" —so to say—where all the elements of the problem are gathered together so that, in the concentration, the action may be more total and effective. So here he speaks only of terrestrial existence, but we can understand that it is a symbolic existence, that is, that it *represents* a universal action. It is a symbolic, concentrated representation. And he says that "the central motive", that is, the purpose of terrestrial existence is to awaken, to develop and finally to reveal in a total manifestation the Spirit which is hidden at the centre of Matter and impels this Matter *from within* outwards towards a progressive development which will liberate the Spirit working from within.

So, in the outer appearances as you see them, at first you find the mineral kingdom with stones, earth, minerals which to us, in our outer consciousness, appear absolutely unconscious. Yet, behind this unconsciousness there is the life of the Spirit, the consciousness of the Spirit, which is completely hidden, which is as if asleep—though that is only an appearance—and which works from within in order gradually to transform this Matter that is completely inert in appearance, so that its organisation may lend itself more and more to the manifestation of consciousness. And he says here that at first this veil of inert Matter is so total that, to a superficial glance, it is something that has neither life nor consciousness. When you pick up a stone and look at it with your ordinary eyes and consciousness, you say, "It has no life, no consciousness." For one who knows how to see behind appearances, there is, hidden at the centre of this Matter—at the centre of *each atom* of this Matter—there is, hidden, the Supreme Divine Reality working from within, gradually, through the millennia, to change this inert Matter into something that is expressive enough to be able to reveal the Spirit within. Then you have the progression of the



history of Life: how, from the stone there suddenly appeared a rudimentary life and through successive species a sort of organisation, that is, an organic substance capable of revealing life. But between the mineral and vegetable kingdoms there are transitional elements; one doesn't know whether they belong to the mineral or already to the vegetable kingdom—when one studies this in detail one sees some strange species which belong neither here nor there, which are not quite this and yet not quite that. Then comes the development of the vegetable kingdom where naturally life appears, for there is growth, transformation—a plant sprouts up, develops, grows—and with the first phenomenon of life comes also the phenomenon of decomposition and disintegration which is relatively much more rapid than in the stone: a stone, if protected from the impact of other forces, can last apparently indefinitely, whereas the plant already follows a curve of growth, ascent and decline and decomposition—but this with an extremely restricted consciousness. Those who have studied the vegetable kingdom in detail are well aware that there is a consciousness there. For instance, plants need sunlight to live—the sun represents the active energy which makes them grow—so, if you put a plant in a place where there is no sunlight, you see it always growing up and up and up, trying, making an *effort* to reach the sunlight. In a virgin forest, for instance, where man does not interfere, there is this kind of struggle among all the plants which are always growing straight upwards in one way or another in their *effort* to catch the sunlight. It is very interesting. But even if you put a flower-pot in a fairly small courtyard surrounded by walls, where the sun doesn't come, a plant which normally is as high as this (*gesture*), becomes as tall as that: it stretches up and makes an effort to find the light. Therefore there is a consciousness, a will to live which is already manifesting. And little by little, with species that are more and more developed, you again reach another transitional passage between what is no longer entirely a plant and still not yet an animal. There are several species like that, which are very interesting. There are those plants which are carnivorous, plants like an open mouth: you throw a fly inside, snap! they swallow it. It is no longer quite a plant, it is not yet an animal. There are many plants of this kind.

Then you come to the animal. The first animals, yes, it is difficult to distinguish them from plants, there is almost no consciousness. But there you see all the animal species, you know them, don't you, right up to the higher animals which, indeed, are *very* conscious. They have their own completely independent will. They are very conscious and marvellously intelligent, like the elephant, for instance; you know all the stories about elephants and their wonderful

intelligence. Therefore, it is already a very perceptible appearance of mind. And through this progressive development, we suddenly pass on to a species which has probably disappeared—traces of which have been found—an intermediate animal like a monkey or of the same line as the monkey—something close to it, similar, if not the monkey as we know it—but already an animal that walks on two legs. And from there we come to man. There is an entire beginning of the evolution of man; we can't say, can we, that he shows a brilliant intelligence, but there is already an action of the mind, a beginning of independence, of independent reaction to the environment and the forces of Nature. And so, in man there is the whole range, right up to the higher being capable of spiritual life.

That is what Sri Aurobindo tells us on this page.

That is all. Now, if you have a question to ask?...

Sweet Mother, here he says: "This consciousness ... reaches its climax of intelligence and exceeds itself in Man...."

Yes, that is what I have just told you: at his highest stage, man begins to be altogether independent of Nature—"altogether" is an exaggeration: he *can* become altogether independent. A man who has realised the spiritual consciousness in himself, who has a direct relation with the divine Origin is literally independent of Nature, of the force of Nature.... And that is what he calls "exceeding itself", that is, that the Being, the inner divine Consciousness, the supreme spiritual Reality in its effort to develop... a conscious means of manifesting itself has arrived at a being capable of having a direct contact with It without going through the whole process of Nature. (*Questions and Answers 1957-1958, CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 209-213*)

It is quite obvious that nothing can be manifested which is not previously contained in what exists. One can't bring something out of nothing. One can make what is there emerge, manifest, express itself, develop; but if nothing had been there, nothing would ever have come out. All progress, all perfection is the result of an inner effort of "something" that is present and seeks to manifest. That is to say, absolutely, the principle comes first and the expression afterwards. As we go on reading *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo will prove this to you in every possible way. If there were not an eternal principle, if there were not—we give it all the names we like, can't we?—a Supreme Reality, there would never have been a universe, because nothing comes out of nothing. (*Questions and Answers 1957-1958, CWM, Vol. 9, p. 222*)



The poetry room

Evolution [2]

All is not finished in the unseen decree;
A Mind beyond our mind demands our ken,
A life of unimagined harmony
Awaits, concealed, the grasp of unborn men.

The crude beginnings of the lifeless earth,
The mindless stirrings of the plant and tree
Prepared our thought; thought for a godlike birth
Broadens the mould of our mortality.

A might no human will nor force can gain,
A knowledge seated in eternity,
A bliss beyond our struggle and our pain
Are the high pinnacles of our destiny.

O Thou who climb'dst to mind from the dull stone,
Face now the miracled summits still unwon.

—Sri Aurobindo

Man the mediator

A dumb Inconscient drew life's stumbling maze,
A night of all things, packed and infinite:
It made our consciousness a torch that plays
Between the Abyss and a supernal Light.

Our mind was framed a lens of segment sight
Piecing out inch by inch the world's huge mass,
And reason a small hard theodolite
Measuring unreally the measureless ways.

Yet is the dark Inconscient whence came all
The self-same Power that shines on high unwon:
Our Night shall be a sky purpureal,
Our torch transmute to a vast godhead's sun.

Rooted in mire heavenward man's nature grows,—
His soul the dim bud of God's flaming rose.

—Sri Aurobindo

India, the Wisdom-land

Here also in India – wonderful, hidden – over the sands
of miles,
Through thousands of miles of coconut groves, by the
winding banks of immense rivers, over interminable
areas of rice-fields,
On the great Ghauts and Himalayas, through vast jungles
tenanted by wild beasts,
Under the cloudless glorious sky – the sun terrible in
strength and beauty – the moon so keen and clear
among the tree-tops,
In vast and populous cities, behind colors and creeds and
sects and races and families,
Behind the interminable close-fitting layers of caste and
custom,
Here also, hidden away, the secret, the divine knowledge.

Ages back, thousands of years lost in the dim past,
A race of seers over the northern mountains, with flocks
and herds,
Into India, the Wisdom-land, descended:
The old men leading – not belated in the rear –
Eagle eyed, gracious-eyed old men, with calm faces, reso-
lute calm mouths,
Active, using their bodies with perfect command and
power – retaining them to prolonged age, or laying
them down in death at will,
These men, retiring rapt – also at will – in the vast open
under the sun or stars,
Having circled and laid aside desire, having lifted and re-
moved from themselves the clinging veils of thought
and oblivion,
Saw, and became what they saw, the imperishable universe.
Within them, sun and moon and stars, within them past
and future,
Interiors of objects and of thoughts revealed – one with
all being –
Life past, death past – the calm and boundless sea
Of deep, of changeless incommunicable Joy.

And now today, under the close-fitting layers of caste and
custom, hidden away,
The same seers, the same knowledge.
All these thousands of years the long tradition kept intact,
Handed down, the sacred lore, from one to another, care-
fully guarded,



Beneath the outer conventional shows, beneath all the
bonds of creed and race, gliding like a stream which
nothing can detain,
Dissolving in its own good time all bonds, all creeds,

The soul's true being – the cosmic vast emancipated life –
Freedom, Equality –
The precious semen of Democracy.

—Edward Carpenter

Sonnet 29

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

—William Shakespeare

Light shining out of darkness

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev'ry hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

—William Cowper

AUM Sri Aurobindo and Mother

Be it Thy words written that like light
Either unfurls parts of being or smites
It open with Knowledge's keen insight
Drawing soul's delight and exaltation,
Or Thy consciousness' reach unsurpassed,
Drawing our heart's veneration unabashed;
Homage to Ye becomes a paeon silent
As words fail thoughts' precious sentiment.
They float like symbols over silence's isle
Formed in the inner depths of a self's offering,
Misted by the heart's inchoate yearnings fine.
Mute, one stands with awed devotion at
Thy pristine sanctuary of silence, vibrant,
That yields gifts secret to your suppliant
As Ye jointly guide with power transcendent.
Caught then are Thy love and grace priceless
By a soul's resolute calm silence in time.
This adoration, nameless and wordless
For the Mother Divine and Seer Sublime,
Like a flower's quiet worship of the sun's light,
Springs like a mantra from Silence's well
To flow in the heart's shrine and there forever dwell.

—Milan Bhardwaj



Apropos

In our ignorance we are like children proud of our success in walking erect and unaided and too eager to be aware of the mother's steadying touch on the shoulder. When we awake, we look back and see that God was leading and upholding us always. —Sri Aurobindo

Love, gentleness, courtesy, never wearying in well-doing, always being ready to give help when help is called for; by these things the heart chakra opens, and the light streams forth from the heart. —White Eagle

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

If you open your heart, love opens your mind. —Charles John Quarto

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

Love is the key. If we start to express the spring of love within that is our true essence, our Truth, our spark of Divinity ... and allow it to flow more ... then all is revealed. Love becomes our guide in life, our connection with All, and our path back to Source. —Peter Shepherd

Choose being kind over being right, and you'll be right every time. —Richard Carlson

Be patient with yourself. Self-growth is tender; it's holy ground. There is no greater investment. —Stephen Covey

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

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

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

Man is lost and is wandering in a jungle where real values have no meaning. Real values can have meaning to man only when he steps on to the spiritual path, a path where negative emotions have no use. —Sai Baba

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

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

This is the way of peace: Overcome evil with good, and falsehood with truth, and hatred with love. —Peace Pilgrim

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

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

The moment one gives close attention to any thing, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself. —Henry Miller

Each today, well-lived, makes yesterday a dream of happiness and each tomorrow a vision of hope. Look, therefore, to this one day, for it and it alone is life. —Sanskrit poem

