

FALL 2020 / WINTER 2021

VOL. 45 NO. 2/3

Collaboration

JOURNAL OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER





... [T]he need of a developing humanity is not to return always to its old ideas. Its need is to progress to a larger fulfilment in which, if the old is taken up, it must be transformed and exceeded. For the underlying truth of things is constant and eternal, but its mental figures, its life forms, its physical embodiments call constantly for growth and change.

SRI AUROBINDO, *The Human Cycle*, p. 26



Collaboration

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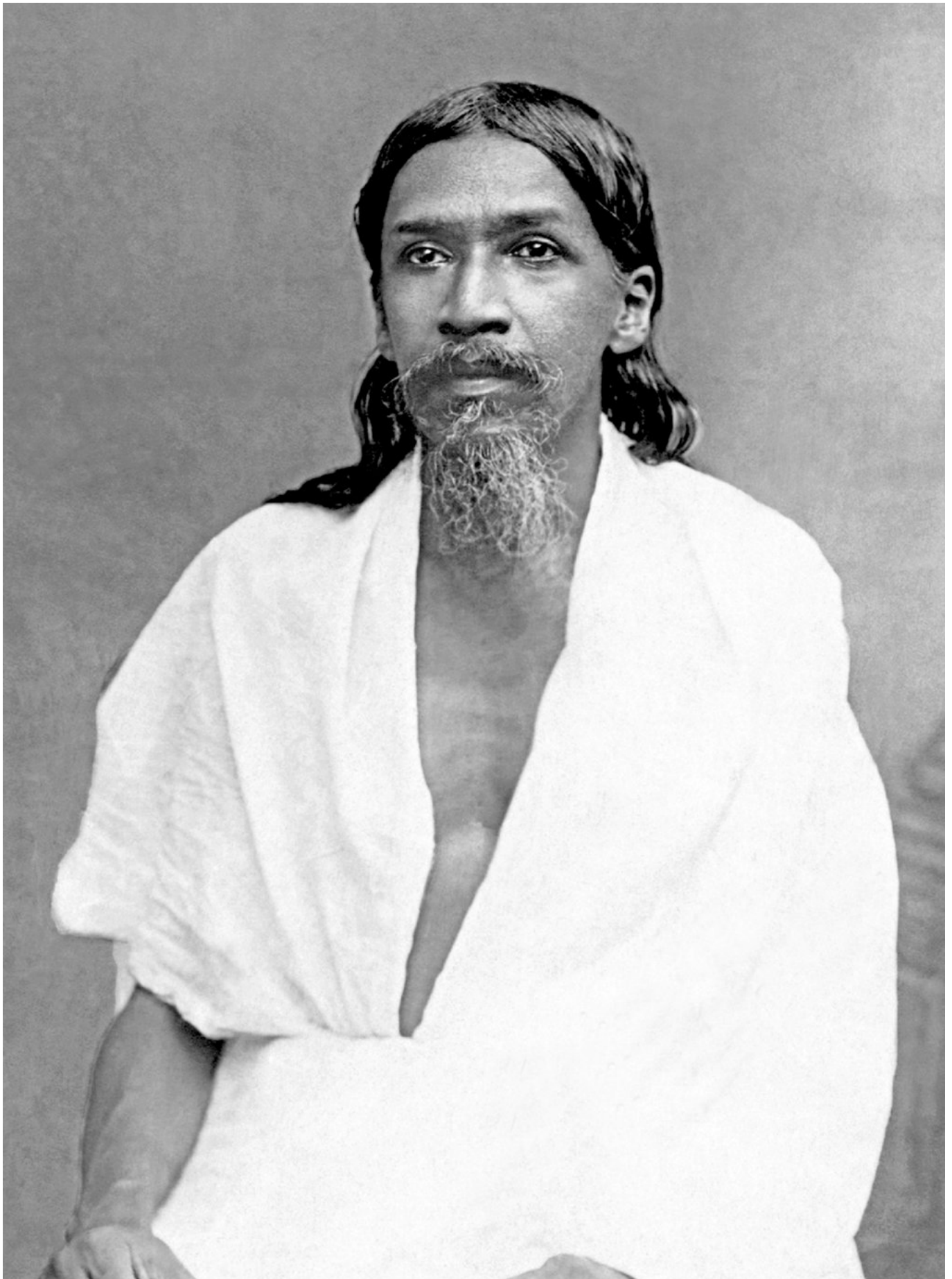
Kavita Patel

ABOUT THE COVER

Morning. A storm breaks above a crystal lake. Swift rains followed by silence; a rift in the clouds. "When mind is still, then Truth gets her chance to be heard in the purity of the silence."—*The Hour of God* by Sri Aurobindo, p. 58. Photo by Chris Anton.



GEORGIA DE LOTZ



Collaboration

JOURNAL OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

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SRI AUROBINDO ASSOCIATION BOARD: Mateo Needham, president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Susan Curtiss, Alicia K. Gonzales, Jonathan Kay, Lynda Lester, Gloria Sayavedra, directors.



From the Editors

When the first issue of Vol. 45 went to press in May 2020, our country was just beginning to grapple with a global pandemic—on top of entering the home stretch of the 2020 campaign season. At the time, many were still holding out for a (futile) return to “normal” and an end to our divisive and polarizing politics. Here at *Collaboration*, we decided to enter into deep *inquiry*: about current events the world over, the future of humanity, and the roles we each fulfill as a collective expression of Integral Yoga.

We grounded this endeavor in Sri Aurobindo’s notion of Time-Spirit and what it might be demanding of us. After witnessing falsehoods about the integrity of science and election rigging repeated over and over by our elected leaders, at the beginning of the new year we again stood aghast—watching our fellow citizens mob the U.S. Capitol. Indeed, we seem to be grappling with falsehood’s grip on human consciousness right when our hopes and aspirations would have us expect the opposite. What is this spirit of the time we are living in? How should we understand the role of falsehood in human evolution and in the process of Integral Yoga? Is human unity through a radical shift in consciousness still a real possibility?

For this double issue, we began by selecting excerpts from Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem *Savitri* (in both English and Spanish) to shed light on falsehood and how we may be guided through this necessary passage. Philip Goldberg’s article “Yoga in Crazy Times” reflects on the current sociopolitical climate of our nation and points out that spiritual practice, though sometimes thought of as a luxury pastime, is in fact what is most needed at this unprecedented and tumultuous time. In Sarani Ghosal Mondal’s “Marriage of Soil and Soul,” we find the leaves of Walt Whitman’s grass a prescient reminder of our paradoxically cosmic wholeness in the widening fields of nature, both the world’s and our own.

John Robert Cornell’s “Grand Canyon of Yoga” invites us to embrace a new guiding narrative in Integral Yoga as we process the gap that exists between our visionary experiences and daily realities. The journal’s inaugural “Gem” from the *Collaboration* Archive—“Living Laboratories of the Life Divine” by Debashish Banerji—artfully expands upon this gap by honing in on *us* as the bridge, and how we connect to supramental consciousness. Conversely, for those just embarking on the spiritual path, Matthias Pommerening provides an accessible way forward in “Approaching Integral Yoga.” To round out these pages of inquiry, in “Harmony in Oneness” Martha Orton proposes a radical change in *human nature*—a complete transformation of consciousness—for resolving human conflict, bridging divides, and unearthing collective oneness. Above all, Sri Aurobindo’s sonnets “Evolution” and “The Call of the Impossible” offer us mountains of hope in our moments of despair. Praise be.

Letter from the Publisher

(Vol. 45 No. 2/3)

The Sri Aurobindo Association of America (SAA) has been under construction for the past 18 months, or perhaps the past 18 years. Better yet, seeds have sprouted and are growing that were planted, fertilized, and tended to by many configurations of previous boards. A glimpse of SAA history can be found on our website at www.collaboration.org. The seedlings have many names: networked collaboratory, aspiring gnostic community, sacred circles, evolutionary organization. “The body will be turned by the power of the spiritual consciousness into a true and fit and perfectly responsive instrument of the Spirit.”¹ Can we say the collective body? The body of the Earth? Let’s claim the aspiration of collective Integral Yoga. “And if there is any higher light ... then there also we need not fear to aspire.”²

In mid-2019 I was nominated for president of the SAA board to succeed Lynda Lester and her 10 years of service in the role of president—in total 19 years (and counting) of service to the board. On the 15th of August 2019, I assumed the role with the request that the board support the manifestation of widening our collective and what we had been envisioning for years, if not decades. We responded—forming two collaborative teams to support the grand expansion of our online and print endeavors.

WEB ADVISORY BOARD

Unlike global websites linked in with Integral Yoga primarily designed to broadcast information, our aspiration is for www.collaboration.org to be a place to form networked social laboratories: collaboratories that explore coming together to help each other understand the cosmos and evolution through our practice of Integral Yoga. SAA sent out a call, and a web group formed to explore these ideas.

In March 2020, this working group started meeting once a month to see what would emerge. We go slow. We ask our highest intimations: What can I offer; what are we here to do together? Joy is a metric. Lightness and fun are present. Govinda (Rytlewski), with years now living and working collectively in an Integral

Yoga ashram and having already redesigned our website, gives us a solid community and Integral Yoga foundation in addition to IT expertise. Alpa Patel, always the connector, came forward to manage the project of calendaring offerings of online Integral Yoga study and practice groups. Jonathan and Shayna Kay bring to our group a deep relation to music, creativity, East-West psychology, and devotion to the Divine Mother. Lynda Lester shares her psychic light and decades of experience collaborating. I schedule the meetings and create the agendas—doing my best to integrate ideas and help what wants to grow. For now, the main emergence is the multimedia participatory series we named Gems from the *Collaboration* Archive (simultaneously offered online and in print). More on that introducing the inaugural Gems article on p. 61.

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Collaboration: Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is the only print journal dedicated to Integral Yoga published in the Americas. While the publication, subscription management, marketing, and mailing have been a collective effort, throughout the journal’s 46 years of publication the editing has primarily been the work of a single editor. For the past 15 years, Larry Seidlitz has been doing an



excellent job, a yeoman's service. Please read Lynda Lester's article of appreciation for Larry on p. 13.

Since at least 2009, SAA has been envisioning working groups for the entire production of the journal: editorial, design, marketing, and management. In early 2020, with John Robert Cornell diligently working on the *Collaboration* design transition for Vol. 45 No. 1, we put out another call. Twelve souls responded and, beginning in July 2020, started meeting once a week. Today most members still meet once a month to connect more deeply to the collaborative process and discuss themes: Time-Spirit, Integral Yoga in the U.S., integral ecology—with Karun Das facilitating the online gatherings. As a former president of SAA, he gives us decades of continuity with Integral Yoga in America. Marco Morelli, our friend and ally in the spiritual evolution, connects us with the cooperative he founded, Infinite Conversations (www.infiniteconversations.org) and brings a broad understanding of uses of the term *integral* to these sessions as well as long-term successes in working harmoniously and deeply with networked collectives.

Thanks to these collective yoga efforts, three working groups emerged (editorial, design, and marketing) to carry forward the journal's expansion. The design working group had centered around Elizabeth Teklinski and also includes Alicia K. Gonzales, John Robert Cornell, and myself. Much of the artistic beauty on these pages is Elizabeth's creation. Unfortunately for *Collaboration*, we lost Elizabeth as our designer to a full-time job. Congratulations, Elizabeth. And, fortunately, she has stayed on with our monthly meetings. We quickly hired Lisa Zamarin, a designer who works with nonprofit organizations and has professional ties to California Institute of Integral Studies. Much of the elegance in this double issue is due to her template formation and flowing together of art, space, and aesthetic wisdom. The rest of us play a supporting role, adding context to artwork, selecting sonnets, offering design feedback, and aspiring for *beauty*, "the divine language in forms."³

Gloria Sayavedra, a director on the SAA board, contributes art and supports the design collaboration with her shining light and loving heart. She is also helping spearhead the call for fellow creative travelers to join

our design ranks in 2021. If you would like to share your professional design experience with our team, please reach out to us! I cannot underscore enough the importance of prioritizing a robust design team as we move forward with this comprehensive redesign—more artistic hands are needed on deck than ever before, and we’d love for yours to join ours.

Running in tandem with design is the editorial working group, which consists of six members. Alicia K. Gonzales (www.theyogapilgrim.com), with over a decade of experience as a writer and editor and a deep consecration to Integral Yoga, keeps our sails trimmed, helping us navigate cutting-edge project management tools as managing editor. Alicia is a natural-born leader, a leader of the future, one who listens, distills, and moves. Karen Mitchell adds expansive, integrative, and creative thought to the team. She brings to the Integral Yoga community and to the Yoga a full life of many experiences she has reflected upon, the wisdom of her many teachers, and a deep love for Earth.

Martha Orton, also a former SAA board member with continuity of history and practice, brings us vast experience as a writer and teacher of Integral Yoga. As Alicia said and I really resonated with: It seems like Martha’s consciousness is hugging the Earth. Bahman Shirazi, with his intelligent *sattva* energy, helps us with cyclical project management and production, author networking, and a keen eye for content. John Robert Cornell, secretary of SAA, has been a perennial contributing author to *Collaboration* and is the keel of the vessel as all the parts are in motion. Here I also schedule the meetings, manage the agenda, and do my best to integrate ideas and help what wants to grow. And, of course, Lynda Lester supports all this from behind with her light and soul power.

The marketing working group was a natural arrangement that came out of our collective yoga. Susan Curtiss of the Boston Sri Aurobindo Center, with decades of psychology and Integral Yoga practice and a psychic love that infuses into the group, intuited that we needed a group to help the journal reach more people. Yes. Elizabeth Teklinski joined. Yes! Marco Masi (www.freeprogressededucation.org), with decades of Integral Yoga practice, depth of intelligence, and a kindness radiating outward, joined us. YES! I wear the same meeting and agenda hats here as well. We went to work with Govinda and the SAA board to add online subscriptions. We also merged with the web working group and are now launching the online facet of Gems from the *Collaboration* Archive, which responds to the Gems article in this double issue.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge Kalpen Shah for providing comprehensive printing services and helping subsidize the journal’s publishing costs. This financial offering is an act of karma yoga, for which we are eternally grateful.

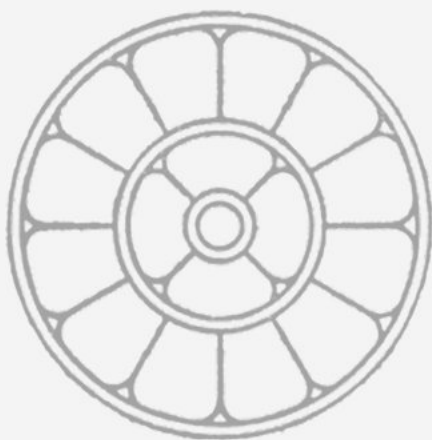
Through this work, we are attempting to live the vision of networked collaboratories, aspiring for that which was written about so beautifully in “The Gnostic Being”—the penultimate chapter of Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine*. Perhaps we are far from that, and perhaps it is right in front of us. How can this work help you expand and deepen your practice of Integral Yoga? How can it help you drop in more deeply to collective yoga? In all these ways of collaborating and expanding, we invite you to participate.

Mobilizing for the Manifestation,
Mateo Needham
President, SAA

NOTES

1. CWSA: 21-22, pp. 1021–22
2. CWSA: 21-22, p. 7
3. CWM: 1, p. 353

CURRENTS





COLLABORATION

September 1974

Matagiri, Mt. Tremper, N.Y. 12457

This erring race of human beings dreams always of perfecting their environment by the machinery of Government and society, but it is only by the perfection of the soul within that the outer environment can be perfected. What thou art within, that outside thou shalt enjoy, no machinery can rescue thee from the law of thy being.

- - Sri Aurobindo

Matagiri was established in May 1968 and received its name from the Mother on 2 August 1968. At present there are eight residents dedicated to the experiment of living the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo within the framework of a collective. Since its inception Matagiri has served as a link to provide information on the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville, the "city of human unity" now evolving in South India as an expression of the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Matagiri also maintains an extensive library for use by the increasing number of scholars who have become interested in Sri Aurobindo.

Because of the growing interest in the thought of Sri Aurobindo, we feel that a more formalized link in the form of a regular publication would be welcome. In this spirit Collaboration is being issued. It will contain news of the Ashram, of Auroville and of other Sri Aurobindo centers. (A list of these centers is available on request.) It will also contain information on events, articles, etc. relating to the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as extracts from their writings. To help in this endeavor, we would appreciate receiving pertinent information from our readers for inclusion in Collaboration.

Recently Matagiri published its first book, appropriately titled Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Collective Yoga (\$1.75). As a publisher, Matagiri has been assigned an International Standard Book Number publisher prefix: 0-89071. This is a trade identification number useful also to librarians and bibliographers. Books published or exclusively distributed by Matagiri will be assigned an ISBN.

AUROVILLE

Earth needs . . . a place where men can live away from national rivalries, social conventions, self-contradictory moralities and contending religions, a place where human beings, free from all slavery of the past, can devote themselves wholly to the discovery and practice of the divine consciousness that is seeking to manifest itself. Auroville wants to be this place and offers itself to all who aspire to live the Truth of tomorrow.

- - The Mother

Among the most pressing needs of Auroville at the present time are the development of self-sufficient agriculture, drilling of a high-capacity deep-bore well and afforestation as well as the completion of the Matrimandir, the Temple of the Mother located in the center of the city. Donations are always welcome and may be sent to Auroville Association, 212 Farley Drive,



As *Collaboration* Enters a New Phase:

A Tribute to Larry Seidlitz for a Job Well Done

LYNDA LESTER

Once upon a time a very long time ago, deep in the woods at the bottom of a mountain—Mother’s Mountain, *mata-giri*—a six-page newsletter called *Collaboration* came into being. Eric Hughes, co-founder of the Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center near Woodstock, New York, created *Collaboration* in 1974 in response to a growing national interest in the thought of Sri Aurobindo.

Printed in blue ink and stapled in the upper left-hand corner, *Collaboration* featured writings from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother along with news of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and the U.S. Integral Yoga community. Over the years, interest in Sri Aurobindo’s thought continued to grow, and so did *Collaboration*—from a modest newsletter to a journal of 10, 24, 36, and sometimes even 72 pages.

Eric Hughes edited *Collaboration* until 1982, when he turned it over to a team of five volunteers in the northeastern U.S. One of the team members, Gordon Korstange, soon became editor, and with substantial assistance from Jean Korstange, produced *Collaboration* through 1994, when I stepped in. With guest-editing support from David Hutchinson and Vishnu Eschner, I managed *Collaboration* for 10 years. Larry Seidlitz guest edited two issues in 2001 and 2002 and took the helm in 2004, after moving from the San Francisco Bay Area to Pondicherry.

The Sri Aurobindo Association would like to give sincere thanks to Larry for a remarkable 16 years of

service—the longest tenure of any *Collaboration* editor. We are grateful for his steady hand at the wheel, superhuman ability to keep the publication on schedule, equanimity in dealing with administrative matters, and dedication to Integral Yoga, which shone in every issue. Through countless production cycles he solicited articles and artwork, worked with authors, conducted interviews, edited submissions, designed the layout, oversaw printing and shipping, and handled subscriptions and distribution in India.

During his tenure, Larry also wrote many book reviews and essays and published a wide array of important pieces. Some notable examples:

- “Inside the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives”—a fascinating interview by Larry with six members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library, in which they discuss the work of bringing Sri Aurobindo’s writings to light
- “A Way Forward” by James Anderson, a poignant meditation on how surrender, detachment, and



The Sri Aurobindo Association would like to give sincere thanks to Larry for a remarkable 16 years of service—the longest tenure of any *Collaboration* editor.

contact with the Divine Force can restore balance and harmony in the face of physical challenges

- “The Experience of the Psychic Being and Its Development” by Alain Grandcolas, a study of psychic emergence in 15 individuals and an exploration of methods for finding the psychic being
- “The Three Sisters” by Michael Miovic, an enchanting, hilarious, and ultimately profound story about a wise mother, three wicked daughters, their departed brother, and an orphan—none of whom may be who they seem to be
- “Serenity, Courage, and Wisdom: Reinhold Niebuhr, Sri Aurobindo, and America’s Spiritual Future,” an insightful essay by Richard Hartz that cites parallels between the two thinkers and sheds light on the American mind and soul
- And, not least, Debashish Banerji’s “Living Laboratories of the Life Divine”—reprinted in this issue as the first installment in the multiplatform series *Gems from the Collaboration Archive*—which describes a new age of world yoga that is moving us closer to a life divine on Earth

Fortunately for *Collaboration* readers, these writings are now available online. In fact, all back issues of *Collaboration* (with the exception of those from the past two years, which are only available to subscribers) are accessible in PDF format (collaboration.org/journal/past-issues).

Meanwhile, as *Collaboration* moves into its next phase, described in this issue’s Letter from the Publisher, Larry is graciously assisting in the transition by providing advice and information, forwarding article submissions, and continuing to handle subscriptions in India.

Today, 46 years after its inception, *Collaboration*, like the Energizer Bunny, is still going. The effort to build a networked collaboratory for its production, management, and integral catalysis incorporates more than a dozen team members, opens a new chapter in the evolution of *Collaboration*, and is a novel experiment in collective yoga. As this process unfolds, the Sri Aurobindo Association is grateful for the years of committed service Larry has given to keep the flame of *Collaboration* alight.

Many thanks, Larry! Warmest wishes and appreciation for a job well done.

LYNDA LESTER is a director of the Sri Aurobindo Association of America and has given a number of presentations at the annual AUM Integral Yoga conference. Her presentation “Our Many Selves: Moving Toward Mastery of Our Complex Being” is online at www.vimeo.com/208724699. Read more at www.Collaboration.org

Los Angeles Center Update

FROM HANSA SEHGAL AND KAVITA PATEL

The Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles (SACLA) was founded in 1953 by Judith M. Tyberg (Jyotipriya), an American yogin, a renowned Sanskrit scholar, and a direct disciple of Sri Aurobindo. In 1987 the Center moved to its present location in Culver City, California, where it received the sacred relics of Sri Aurobindo. SACLA continues in the tradition established by its founder with a focus on the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

We began 2020 with our annual New Year's Day program with children's offering, where we were able to meet in person. After that it has been an unexpected year; the inability to have satsang in person has led to a beautiful virtual biweekly satsang, joyously led by Vikas. Continuing our satsang powerfully serves to reinforce our bond with the divine through a collective aspiration. Inspirational readings from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo remind us that the challenges of COVID-19 call for a new outlook through a deepened inner engagement. We have been fortunate to have musicians amongst our members and thus have been able to add some devotional offerings to our darshan programming.

In February, April, and August 2020 we held our Darshan Day programs, which were organized and moderated by Vikas and his team of collaborators. Vikas does this with deep devotion to our gurus. The programs contained readings of their words relevant to the day itself. All present participated in the readings as well as shared additional readings that they had selected. We usually have music and

devotional songs offered by Ashoke and others and end with a group meditation. Afterward we all shared a potluck (*prasad*), where we engaged one on one with those present.

For the first time, SACLA participated in a joint virtual celebration with other centers via Zoom for Sri Aurobindo's 148th birthday, hosted by La Grace Integral Life Center on August 15, 2020. The program was the first of its kind and well attended. Impeccably organized, it created a quiet and concentrated atmosphere in which we spontaneously felt drawn to Sri Aurobindo. The same day, our center held its celebration with keen offerings from members in the form of readings, chants, and personal reminiscences.

August 2020 also saw the launch of our new quarterly series newsletter "Perfection of the Body"—inspired and curated by Lakshman. This is meant to highlight the very significant and unique role the body has in Integral Yoga. This past year we have also initiated our multiphase renovation project and will continue as and when the funds are available.

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La nAVette Accessible Shuttle Service

FROM AVI CANADA

La nAVette (*navette* means shuttle in French) is the first real public transportation system in Auroville. It's ecological, accessible, punctual, and safe. Initiated by the Accessible Auroville Public Bus team, this project aims to address the urgent need in Auroville for such a system. With increasing traffic, noise, pollution, dust, stress, and accidents—in addition to loneliness—forerunners are complaining that people are becoming too individualistic, and that they are no longer finding the collective feeling of the early days.

This is due to several reasons: Life is indeed more comfortable now than in the pioneering times; people have a tendency to stay at home, often alone, largely because of the internet; when people do leave their homes, they use their own vehicles. And if Aurovilians don't have their own transportation, or are unable to use it due to age or fear of traffic, they remain at home and often receive few visitors. La nAVette Accessible Shuttle Service hopes to correct these problems by fostering more safety, sustainability, inclusiveness, and intercommunity engagement.

After a team of European experts surveyed Auroville in January 2019, they concluded that there is indeed a crucial need for such a system in Auroville—all that's missing are the funds. The planned budget for the shuttle service covers four electric vans made in India as well as batteries, drivers, maintenance, etcetera for a

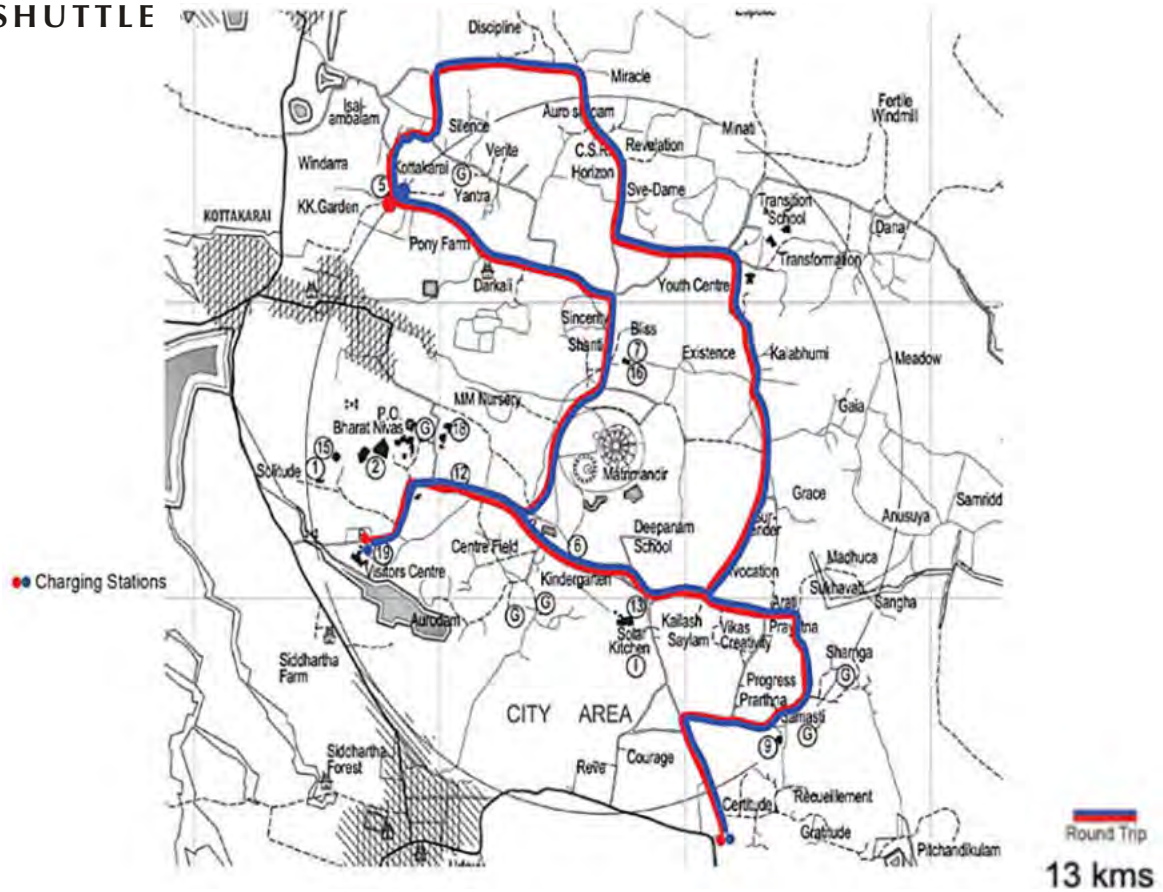
total projected cost of USD \$65,000 for three years. Consequently a fundraising campaign has been launched to support the project.

As shown in Map A, La nAVette will consist of two circuits of electric vans serving all communities along Crown Road. This service will be available daily from early morning to late evening (20 bus stops every 30 minutes in both directions) and accessible at a minimum cost to all Aurovilians, newcomers, volunteers, visitors, workers, students, as well as people with reduced mobility thanks to a portable ramp.

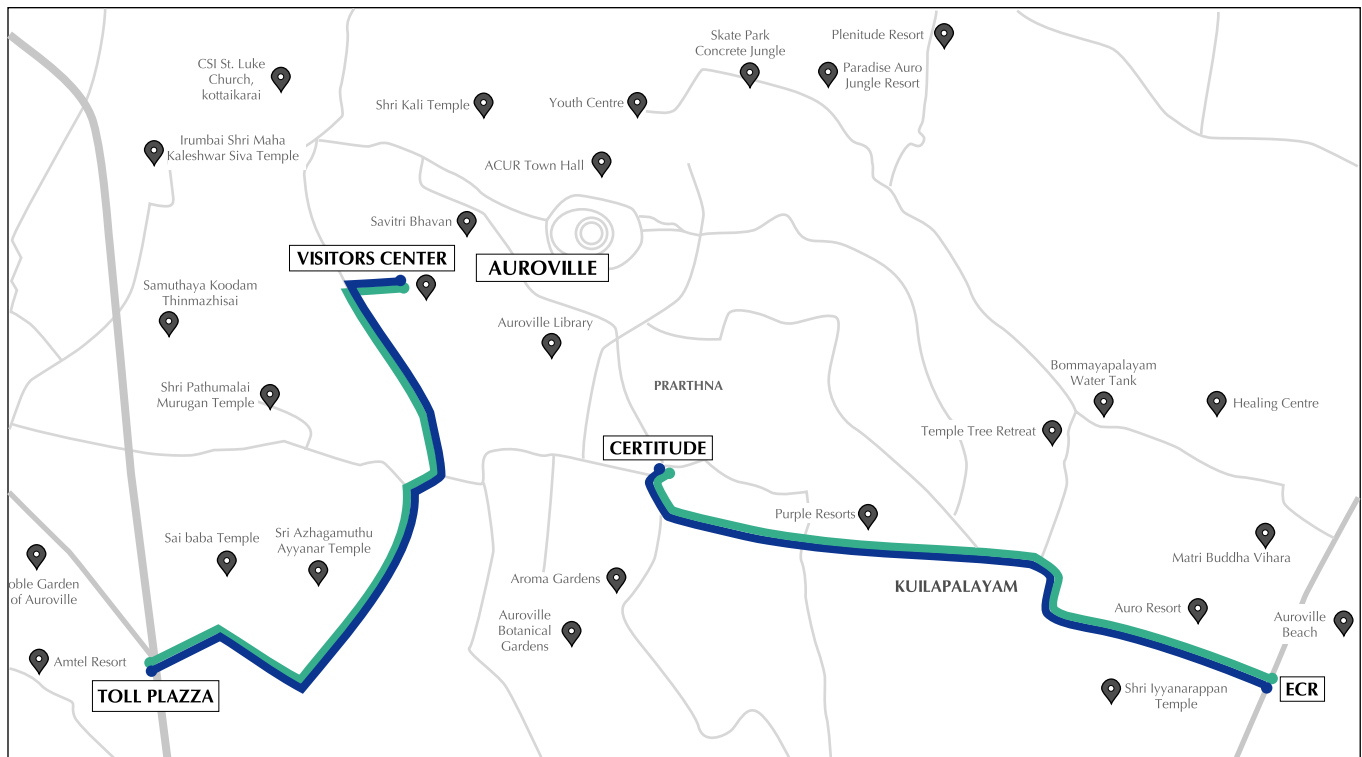
Two additional circuits have recently been added to the project in order to serve the Aurovilian communities outside the circle of the city. One van will provide ongoing daily service starting from the main road near Auro-Orchard, proceed across Edayanchavadi village to the Visitor's Center, and return the same way. Another van will provide ongoing daily service starting from the sea road, cross Kuilapalayam village, reach Certitude, and return the same way. A transfer service will also be created to connect the two city circuits to the two circuits in the bioregion.

Your donation makes a difference. Please send contributions through your AVI association or directly to Unity Fund, Auroville (Account 252687 La nAVette).

CITY SHUTTLE

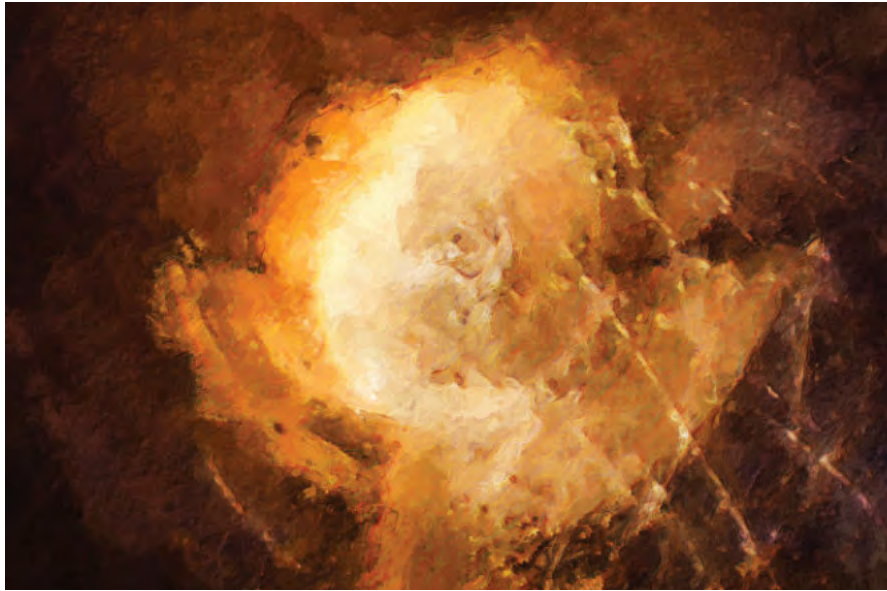


EXTERNAL SHUTTLE



**TOLL PLAZA TO VISITORS
CENTER 20 MINUTES | 4 KMS**

**CERTITUDE TO ECR
20 MINUTES | 4.5 KMS**



The Year that Wasn't a Year

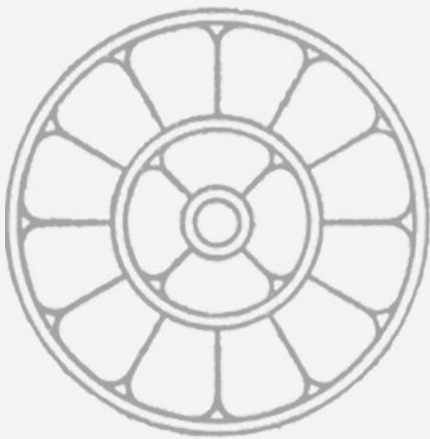
KAREN MITCHELL

*Burnt to ground,
to root
to bone
in a year
that wasn't a year
but fire's own self-creating
whirling, wasting wind
forcing us out of place
where we were told to be,
out of time
that had dried out
before the lightning struck
as if certain
everything was tinder
very tender,
and ready to yield to flame.*

*What is left?
What remains?
Of the year that wasn't a year,
but a pandemic of Light
and Fire.*

KAREN MITCHELL joined the journal's editorial team on account of her love for the Integral Yoga community. She enjoys participating in collaborative projects and has been inspired by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Image: Elizabeth Teklinski

REFLECTIONS





Yoga in Crazy Times

PHILIP GOLDBERG

Ever since my new book was released in August, I've been congratulated on my impeccable timing. What better time for a title like *Spiritual Practice for Crazy Times*? The truth is, I deserve about as much credit as a gardening shop that sells shovels does when a blizzard hits. The book was conceived this past spring, when life in America was already pretty crazy; the final editing and proofreading were completed this past winter, when the coronavirus was largely confined to Asia and the phrase "shelter-in-place" had not yet been uttered. I'm happy to accept credit for producing a useful book, but I can't claim to have known just how insane the world would become by the time it was published.

In the early days of 2019, a little more than halfway through the Trump era, I began to hear normally stable and happy people say that current events were making them anxious, worried, depressed, bewildered, enraged, or otherwise discombobulated. I knew many of those people to be genuinely spiritual. They included earnest veterans of one path or another who had kept up a daily sadhana for decades; relative neophytes who had set foot on their paths only recently; and dabblers with a sincere spiritual orientation to life but complacent about engaging that impulse. To my surprise, even some members of the first group were neglecting their practices. When I asked why, I heard—in addition to the usual excuse of being too busy—two reasons that reflected the challenges of this period in history.

One set of people said they were too agitated, too stressed out, and too unsettled by what was going on in the world to meditate (or practice yoga, or mindfulness, or prayer, or whatever else their sadhana might consist of). A second consisted of activists who were trying to fix the social conditions that upset them. They were getting involved in political campaigns, raising money for social justice groups, organizing demonstrations, blogging, or otherwise trying to make a difference. They saw spiritual practice as a luxury they couldn't afford. In my book, I quoted a woman who gave voice to a sentiment I'd heard from others as well: "I don't want to waste time on my inner life when there's so much at stake out there." She didn't want to lose the anxiety and righteous anger that were driving her efforts; she feared being neutered by spiritual practice.

I found both arguments understandable but radically misconceived, and I said so in an article. About the first set of objections I wrote by way of analogy that taking a shower can be good for our well-being when we're relatively clean, but it's absolutely vital when we're filthy. Waiting till we're calm and content before sitting to do a centering practice is like showering only when we're clean, or seeing a doctor only when we're feeling well. Meditation, yoga asanas, breathwork, prayer, mindfulness—they don't require calmness as a prerequisite; they *produce* that

calmness. You can't be too agitated to do the very things that are designed to reduce agitation. I argued that it's precisely in conditions of turbulence and turmoil that we need the refuge of spiritual practice the most.

To the honorable and compassionate individuals who were busy making the world a better place, I said that the spiritual methods developed by the rishis of old and the mystics of all traditions are not escape mechanisms. They don't necessarily lead to withdrawal or disinterested detachment. They're not like tranquilizer darts or the drugs that turn mental patients into docile creatures. They don't make you a religious fanatic who thinks God will take care of everything so we don't have to bother, or a renunciate who sees the material world as a mere illusion and the human drama as a stage play they can witness without playing a role. On the contrary, I proposed, spiritual practices can be a foundation for engaged citizenship—and a platform for soulful, compassionate, effective action. It may seem too obvious to mention, but it was necessary to remind my activist friends that Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Jesus, and countless venerated saints were social warriors whose roots were planted firmly and deeply in spiritual soil.

The article was well received and led to conversations with the publisher of my previous book, Hay House, about expanding the core premise into a book.

Faced with filling a couple hundred pages mostly with practical tools, guidelines, and instructions, I began harvesting every practice I'd learned about over half a century. I ferreted out other methods to fill the gaps in my own knowledge base, drawing mainly from the yogic tradition. I favored techniques that have been validated by studies in psychology and neurophysiology.

As a guiding framework, I was immediately drawn to two passages from the Bhagavad Gita that had hit me like lightning bolts in the early days of my path, and have held up ever since. The first is from chapter 2, verse 38, when Krishna tells Arjuna that it's possible to maintain "equanimity in gain and loss, victory and



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defeat, pleasure and pain.” When I read that for the first time, circa 1968, the suggestion that one might achieve a state of unruffled, composed, imperturbability in the midst of life’s ups and downs blew my troubled mind. It was enough of a promise to make me dive more deeply into the spiritual teachings of the East, and to try out the yogic technologies that, I came to realize, were the keys to developing that desired equanimity. Soon enough I took up transcendental meditation (this was only months after the Beatles put it on the global map and made their watershed journey to India).

I discovered quickly that daily practice *did* give me more equanimity. The inner calm from meditation carried over when I went about my day, at least for a while, like a sponge staying wet for some time after it’s been soaked. In my youthful naiveté, I expected to soon get to a point where I’d never ever again get upset by setbacks. I’d be immune to the ravages of life. I’d be above it all, supremely unattached, in the world but not of it, soaked in peace and bliss at all times, no matter what.

Imagine my surprise. Needless to say, human life being what it is, shocks, upheavals, losses, crises, and

ordinary annoyances continued to erupt. However, as time went by I realized that I did, in fact, have *more* equanimity at those times than I had in the past, and when I lost it—as I did often enough—I regained some measure of equilibrium fairly quickly. That personal observation, I was pleased to discover, has been shown in studies to be typical of long-term practitioners of meditative methods.

Sri Aurobindo referred to the quality I’m calling equanimity as “perfect equality.” In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, he says, “The very first necessity for spiritual perfection is a perfect equality. Perfection in the sense in which we use it in Yoga, means a growth out of a lower undivine into a higher divine nature.” He described it as “putting on the being of the higher self and a casting away of the darker broken lower self or a transforming of our imperfect state into the rounded luminous fullness of our real and spiritual personality.” He called it “a means by which we can move back from the troubled and ignorant outer consciousness into this inner kingdom of heaven and possess the spirit’s eternal kingdoms ... of greatness, joy and peace.”¹

And so, when I started outlining my book in 2019,

that Gita verse became a lodestone. My goal was to help people access the source of equanimity within themselves, by opening up to what I call a sanctuary of peace within—to absorb it, sustain it, and carry it with them in good times and bad. This, it should be obvious, is especially important in chaotic times like ours, when gain and loss, victory and defeat, pleasure and pain are being experienced en masse in unpredictable and unprecedented ways.

The second Gita passage that has guided my life and also framed my book is from chapter 2, verse 48. Like every sentence in the Gita, it's been translated in dozens of ways, but they all come down to the pithy version I favor: "Established in Yoga, perform action." I've never found a more concise and powerful formula for living.

Having grown up in a secular, quasi-Marxist household in which religion was the opium of the masses, I had an abiding suspicion that the Eastern philosophies that seemed so rational, empirical, and practical would let me down by lapsing into dogma—or by asking me to turn my back on worldly life. I knew I was not cut out for either renunciation or believing in anything on faith alone. But here was Krishna, the voice of the divine, saying that responsible, dynamic action was not to be avoided. And if the words themselves weren't convincing enough, the context certainly was. The message was delivered to a warrior, Arjuna, and he wasn't being told to ride off to an ashram or settle into a Himalayan cave. Rather, he was implored to get off his butt, pick up his weapons, and vanquish the bad guys who threatened his civilization. It doesn't get more dynamic or worldly than that.

But *first*, the divine messenger said, establish yourself in yoga. I call it the Spiritual Two-Step: 1) Turn within, get immersed in the silent core of Being, and ground yourself in the unified consciousness that defines yoga, and 2) Come out better equipped to perform your duties, fulfill your responsibilities, and engage human life to the fullest.

With those verses as a touchstone, I felt confident as

an author to present spiritual practice not as just a refuge in crazy times, but as a strategy for practical living—not merely a rest stop, but a refueling station; not just an escape valve, but a launching pad from which to spring into action.

To be fair, there are plenty of renouncers in spiritual circles, not only vow-taking monks and nuns, but people who are reclusive by nature and whose paths draw them to disengage as much as humanly possible from the world's travails. But even India's wandering sadhus have to feed and shelter their bodies; most monastics live in communities and perform works of service to others; and dedicated householders have to manage their relationships with family members, neighbors, colleagues, and others. Whatever our degree of worldly involvement, the truth of that two-step applies: transformative spiritual practices tend to make people calmer, clearer, wiser, more compassionate, more empathetic, and more discerning than they would otherwise be. This does not, of course, suggest that regular sadhana will turn ordinary seekers into geniuses, perpetual winners, or saints. But experience and research clearly indicate that practice improves the odds that our actions will be more productive, harmonious, and benevolent—and less likely to overwhelm our inner stability.

As Sri Aurobindo puts it in *Essays on the Gita*, the state that Krishna points Arjuna to is not one of "disinterestedness" or "dispassionate abnegation." How could it be? Would you want a soldier who's protecting your loved ones not to care? Yes, you'd want him to be unattached to the fruits of his actions, as the Gita teaches. But indifferent? Certainly not. Rather, says Sri Aurobindo, "it is a state of inner poise and wideness which is the foundation of spiritual freedom. With that poise, in that freedom we have to do the 'work that is to be done,' a phrase which the Gita uses with the greatest wideness including in it all works ... and which far exceeds, though it may include, social duties or ethical obligations."

It's analogous to the state of cool composure we look for in athletes when the game is on the line; in leaders when decisions have to be made in a crisis; in parents



when kids are in trouble; and in ourselves at all times, but especially in emergencies. No guarantees, of course, but the evidence suggests that such an inner state can be cultivated. We may never achieve the wished-for perfection, but we can at least creep closer to it inch by inch, making fewer mistakes along the way.

That's the practical, everyday take on "Established in Yoga, perform action"—and most readers of a book like mine will relate to it. But in truth, the Gita calls

presidential election would be heating up and the crazy world would be even crazier. No one knew it would be *this* insane, of course, but I'm glad I included my humble appeal for spiritual practitioners to take seriously their role as citizens. Sri Aurobindo alluded to the reason that's so important:

The Gita does not teach us to subordinate the higher plane to the lower, it does not ask the awakened moral consciousness to slay itself on



us to a higher perspective and a greater purpose. I allude to it in the final chapter, titled "Sacred Citizenship: Giving Back from the Inside Out." As I said earlier, I completed the book before the COVID-19 lockdown took hold, and before all the astonishing and unsettling events during this past summer of our collective discontent. I assumed early on that when the book was released, in August 2020, the

the altar of duty as a sacrifice and victim to the law of the social status. It calls us higher and not lower; from the conflict of the two planes it bids us ascend to a supreme poise above the mainly practical, above the purely ethical, to the Brahmic consciousness. It replaces the conception of social duty by a divine obligation. The subjection to external law gives

place to a certain principle of inner self-determination of action proceeding by the soul's freedom from the tangled law of works.²

Not everyone is a social activist, of course, but we can all do something, however seemingly insignificant, to make the world a better place. We can all access the silent source within and listen to the voice of higher wisdom, or feel the faint stirring of a conscience that's

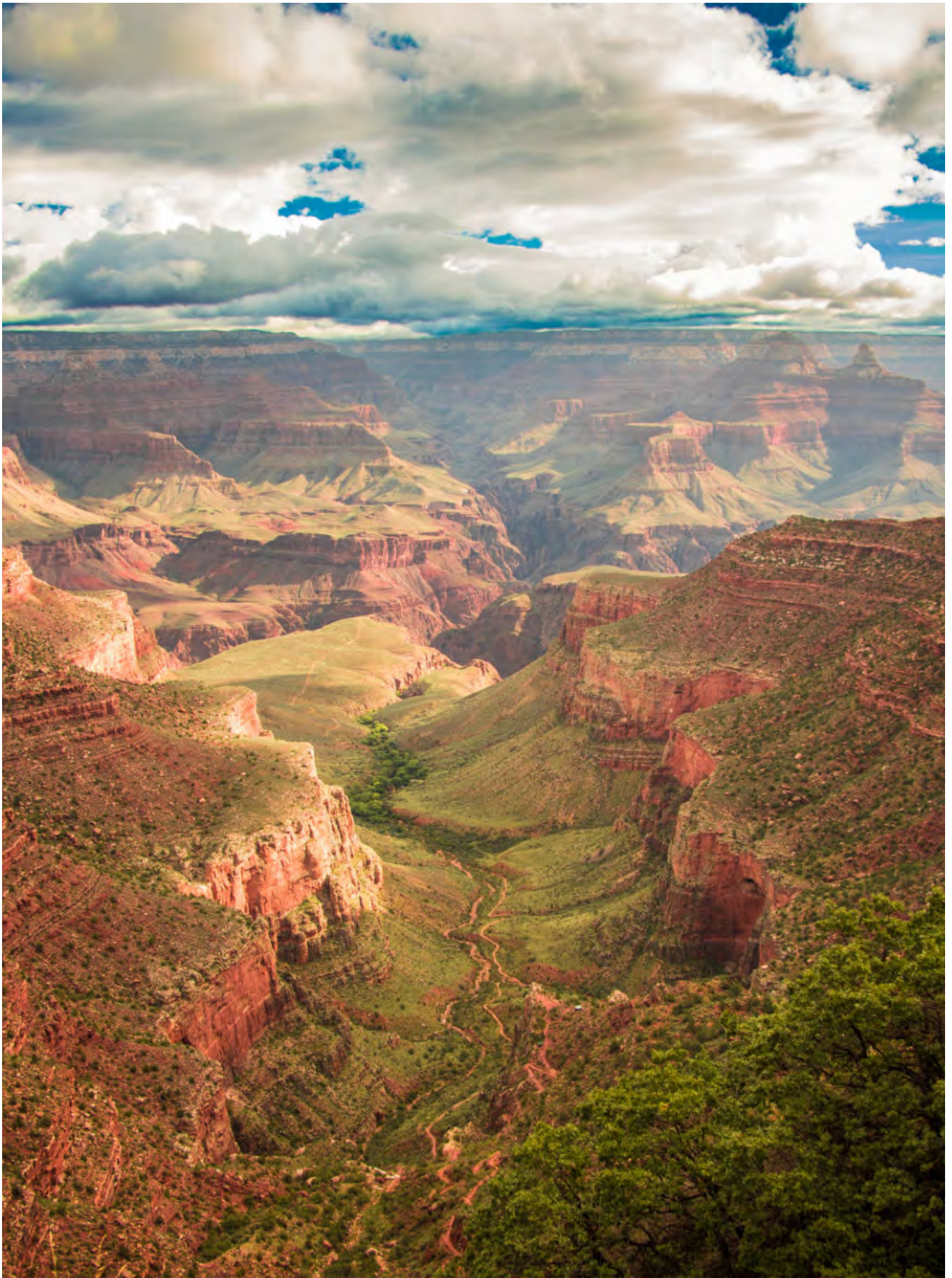
in tune with divine intent, and then act with strength and compassion in whatever sphere of life we're drawn to. At this moment in history, we are all Arjunas, and every gesture counts. I concluded the book, and I'll conclude this offering (which I'm honored to have been asked to contribute), by quoting the Buddha: "Do not overlook tiny good actions, thinking they are of no benefit. Even tiny drops of water in the end will fill a huge vessel."



NOTES

1. CWSA: 23-24, pp. 698, 699
2. CWSA: 19, p. 35

PHILIP GOLDBERG is the author of numerous books, including the award-winning *American Veda*, the biography *The Life of Yogananda*, and *Spiritual Practice for Crazy Times*. A popular public speaker, he blogs on the Spirituality & Health website, cohosts the Spirit Matters podcast, and leads American Veda Tours to India. His website is www.philipgoldberg.com. • Image: Elizabeth Teklinski



The Grand Canyon of Yoga

JOHN ROBERT CORNELL

Inspired by a talk of Charles Eisenstein about the space between the old stories and the new story not yet dreamed.

We have a new story—*Savitri*,
The Life Divine,
or the life of the Mother.
We have the *Agenda*,
we have a vastness of their stories and efforts.

And then we have our lives.

I stare at my breakfast plate ...
and I can't, don't see God.
I walk down the street oblivious.
I have highs and then crash.
There appears to be a canyon between the vision
and my life.

Nothing to despair about here. Sri Aurobindo and
every other spiritual teacher have told us that's the
way it works. Mother herself was still working through
the refusal in her body, the No of Nature.

Still, we aspire for more. And we want to be, and
see, and hear the work, the efforts, the grace that
lead to more—to *become* the new story.

Between the No and the realization, between obliv-
iousness and consciousness, between despair and
merging, between death and love, there is an
existential gap, a canyon.

Savitri describes the gap in incandescent word,
image, and example.

We are in the gap.
We are transitional.
We are ... *the gap*.

We are touched but not realized. We are in a place of
work, of new stories, of new methods, of new experiences.
New victories and new failures.

Our *collective* yoga operates in the gap.

We have guideposts and experiences, but we don't
believe them ... fully. There is a gap. How do we
operate in the gap to narrow it? What are examples?
What are the life-altering images, transporting
sounds, shining sculptures, emerging structures,
nascent stories of navigation, of transition?

The work, to be genuine (sincere), must come out of
something genuine, not from the old story, but not
from a new story not yet fully trusted.

Collaboration is a gap journal. A gap journal
explores the gap(s) and the paths through the gap
toward something more complete. It explores the
victories, the manifestos, the tsunamis, the
supernovas of the newness, but *it dare not be*
complacent. It must dare the edge of the gap, or even
drive the edge forward, or renovate paths and
landscapes of the gap not fully faced or loved or
integrated.

Collaboration needs gap stories.
"By whatever path," Mother said!

The gap *is also* the Divine, also He and She.
How? we want to know,
we want to feel,
we want to witness,
we want *to be* the gap ...
waking up to the Golden Mountains
in its depths.

JOHN ROBERT CORNELL joined the *Collaboration* team to help support the journal grow into a more beautiful, relevant, and accessible service that meets our troubled times with love, and catches the visions of beauty and unity breaking on us in waves from the future. • Image: Lukas Kloeppel

Approaching Integral Yoga

MATTHIAS POMMERENING

We might see yoga as a process of unification with something we individually and uniquely consider to be beyond or essential to ourselves in some way, something to be discovered. If we feel we have an intuitive knowing of something yet unrealized waiting for us within or above our everyday experiences of ourselves, we probably would define and contextualize it in unique ways when pressed to put words to it. Or maybe we are in disbelief of the possibility that some seemingly mystical experience of supposed profound significance to our self-understanding wouldn't just be a fancy of our imagination. On the contrary, we could be open to the idea that we are yet unaware of something waiting to be experienced in the depths or on the peaks of consciousness. But even if such inner discoveries can actually be made, we might still be wondering if it would really be worth our time and effort to pursue them. Another reader might feel that they've got a pretty good grasp of consciousness and its forces already, and wonder if there is more to be discovered, therefore looking into Integral Yoga from that angle. However we see ourselves to be positioned on the topic, and maybe we catch ourselves shifting between these points of view, we don't have to take somebody's word for it but can endeavor to make our own experiences.

THE INNER RESEARCHER

A nice thing about inner discoveries is that we can all make them within ourselves on our own journeys of consciousness exploration, if we dare the adventure, or sense that there is still more to it despite us having consciously traveled on the inner roads for a while now. In that spirit of inner exploration we can take the attitude of practical consciousness researchers. What can we find out for and in ourselves about facets of reality that might still be hidden within? What could be the potential benefits of these discoveries to our inner and outer lives? An integral exploration would have us search all aspects of our individual selves

(mind, life, and body) for greater insights. Practical inner inquiry into and development of consciousness in an integral way can also come to mean that deeper and higher states of consciousness and their accompanying faculties, which are possibly unveiled in the process, become active in us. The growing integral knowledge of our familiar selves and that which waits to be found behind and above can eventually coalesce into integral individual and collective development. We might start with the question: What is the nature of reality underlying, supporting, and evolving our minds, lives, and bodies, and how can we access it consciously to develop integrally? A first step toward finding answers within can simply be to attempt to become more conscious of our everyday thoughts, feelings, and actions.

What do we mean by "becoming more conscious"? If we haven't subjected ourselves to rigorous self-inquiry already and paid close attention to ourselves, we might find ourselves running on autopilot a lot of the time once we start looking inside. Thoughts just seem to come and go, accompanied by feelings, and they all seem to be somehow related to actions. Even just figuring out the causalities of everyday dynamics and events of life can appear to demand a lot of attention and concentration. We may ask ourselves why we think, feel, and do things and observe each moment, if it was first a thought, an emotion, or a sensation that started a chain of other reactions within us that lead to outer words and acts. Spending more time on this exercise we might find that a lot of what we considered to be conscious choices are actually influenced by subconscious processes and mechanisms that can seem almost deterministic. We might even find that what we think to be the most detached, uninvolved, and therefore objective station within ourselves, from which we attempt to look plainly at our inner dynamics, is actually still coated in camouflage paint of even more subtle patterns of thinking and beliefs. And that might still just be the surface of



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the inner structure we are looking at, with its architecture being made up of more or less conscious worldviews, built and sustained by emotional investment, maintained and enforced by habitual patterns and actions. Thereby “just” the everyday contents of our minds, the movements of our emotions and how they relate to our actions can present themselves as a complex field to become conscious of.

These inner research objects of our everyday lives might seem mundane to us. Still, observing what we might perceive to be ordinary within our daily experiences can be a very useful exercise to find a consciousness within us that is finally free from thoughts, and thoughts about thoughts, with which we usually try to make sense of ourselves. Looking intently and consistently at what goes on inside, we may find that we are not only our thoughts, feelings, and bodies that act. Through increasingly frequent, concentrated inner inquiry, there could open up and reveal within us a consciousness that we experience to be behind, above, or underlying the contents of our minds, emotional states, and physical sensations. This inner point or plane from which we calmly observe the phenomena happening within our consciousness could potentially become a familiar station that we are able to take up at will, just like we can focus on specific lines of thought in our mind or become aware of an emotion. Cultivating an observer's view on all that constitutes and goes on within ourselves might

progress by applying will and inwardly oriented concentration. We could see it as another aspect to our consciousness that can be perceived to be more subtle and might be easily overlooked if we don't go looking for it. Having found this inner place, dwelling in its quietly observant stillness, the experience might deepen into an increasingly calming silence, taking us into a vast sense of peace, inner wideness, and free stability.

While one might be content with this inner resource being permanently available and active within oneself, and enjoy delightful inner states and their potential benefits to the outer personality, an integral approach regards this only as a first step. Applying our will and concentration, we might very well achieve a greater degree of “unification” with such a silent, peaceful, and equally regarding consciousness within. This process of identification with what we've discovered inwardly can shift the perspective away from being a personality having these impersonal experiences. Instead one might experience being essentially an indwelling individual consciousness of more subtle substance than our personality, inherently peaceful and in itself calm contentment (among other qualities to possibly be discovered). Taking this point of view or having the experience of becoming the consciousness deep within the personality, one then turns as this inner being and applies oneself to one's personality to guide it. Traveling on



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Elizabeth Tekemshi

the inner road of completely shifting one's sense of self into the selfless aspect of that inherently peaceful inner being could then become another fascinating stage in one's expedition on the oceans of consciousness.

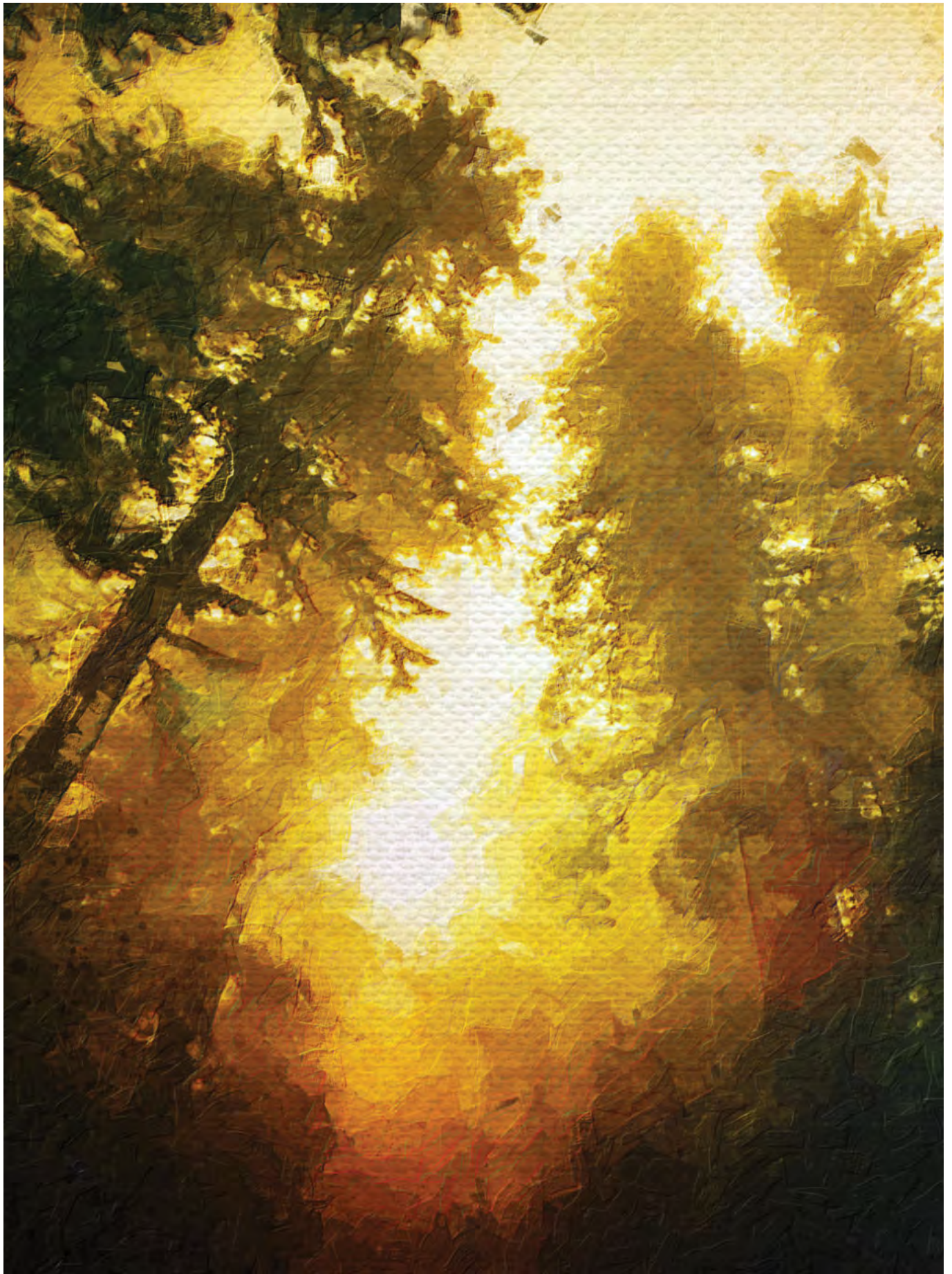
Once we have succeeded in permanently moving into our newfound quiet, happy home within, if we do not shut ourselves into it but remain open, the still and passive wideness might become receptive to further experiences. Once we've made contact and "unified" ourselves with that essential aspect discovered within or above, we might allow ourselves to experience it ever more fully. Other aspects of consciousness progressively unveiling themselves within and beyond us through yoga may even be considered unbearable in their ultimate intensity without sufficient inner preparation. The processes involved in adapting and opening our personalities to the increasing inner and higher consciousness becoming accessible to and active in us may follow their own rhythms of ebb and flow in inner and outer time. Entering into the dynamics of these processes of yoga we may begin to experience an emergence of the inner consciousness into our personality, a progressive fusion of the two. In an integral sense this further process of "unification" can involve our minds, lives, and bodies opening to and receiving ever more completely the qualities of that which is behind, within, or above and beyond our personality. We may find that the essentiality we discovered within is only just beginning to reveal itself to us by experiences of calm, quiet, and peace.

What effects might these yogic processes have on our lives? Let's look at the mind as an example: The peaceful consciousness we found within might infuse our ways of thinking, allow us to step back, look at the ideas we entertain, hold, identify ourselves with, from an inner distance, giving us more room to consciously and flexibly receive, work with, and express perspectives. Our minds might become more plastic and open to inspiration, allowing for increasingly harmonious organization of our lives and works, as well as efficient and joyous communications. In the eventual total absence of thought in a

mind filled with peace from within and above, entirely new kinds of knowing and new forms of knowledge might become available to us. A wider, calmer, and more observant mind might become more directly perceptive of a reality that was previously filtered by patterned veils of thought. We might quietly observe, wait in inner silence, and suddenly receive insights that prove to be valuable despite us being unable to find and describe any chain of thought having preceded them. In our expression we might find ourselves equally and inexplicably seized by inspiration that we don't expect, which we can't claim to be the result of our own efforts, but that we might find to be an outflow of that consciousness within or above. We may find consciousness to creatively infuse our words with its qualities and thereby use speech as one of the means to extend our inner atmosphere outward, to share what we have discovered and are progressively becoming within with others in transformative collective works.

RESEARCH TAKES TIME

Integral Yoga is not a quick fix, as even the previously described inner discoveries through inner exploration and their effects on one's personality, here exemplified by looking more closely at the mind, which is only one part of ourselves—and may be, despite all the difficulties we might have with it, the most easily changed in the context of Integral Yoga—are merely beginnings. These processes, let alone the ones to follow them, take time. And they aren't linear but cyclical in their progression. We may find ourselves one day experiencing intense inner states of joy and freedom from the limited scope and dynamics of our personalities. On other days, one might find oneself again fully identified with the habits of one's thoughts, the sometimes chaotic dynamics of one's feelings, and the instinctual reactions of the body. These oscillations between the inner and the outer, the higher and the lower, are to be expected as dynamics, although they are not accepted to be final states in this yoga. Through the application of one's will, concentration, and intention to become ever more that which is free and apply it to the personality, open it to *That*, holding on to the goal of changing one's consciousness and nature, increasingly one



may spend more time within in peaceful and contented freedom. And one might even find one's outer nature to change or the distinction between the inner and the outer to dissolve in the transformative stages of Integral Yoga.

These probably don't set in right on the day one decides to take up Integral Yoga, nor the next day or the one after that. This yoga is not done with a weekend workshop or a retreat, and can't be compared to knowledge and skill learned and applied in formal yoga trainings that result in certificates to teach others. There are no Integral Yoga certification processes, only inner processes that finally result in visible outer changes of an individual's or group's capacity for transformative inner and outer action as well as fundamental changes of our personalities, and ultimately our physical bodies. But who knows how far off these visible signs of "successful" Integral Yoga really are? Their visibility also depends on the sincerity, receptivity, and discernment of the one looking for these "results"—not merely the ability or even willingness of a practitioner of Integral Yoga to entertain another's curiosity by exhibiting "achievements." Further, Integral Yoga aims at the complete transformation of the entire human nature, including its most physical, material, and inconscient aspects. And the inner and outer works not only of the individual, but of the collective, don't stop. On the contrary, they intensify and become more demanding the further one progresses. For a yoga of such dimensions a well established foundation can be considered essential.

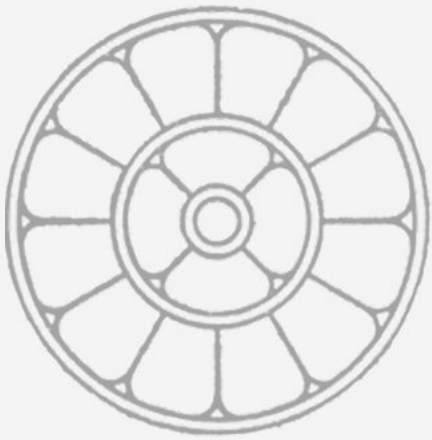
The first steps have been referred to above as becoming conscious of one's outer nature, to establish contact with one's inner being, to make that connection more and more stable—ideally identifying and fully shifting one's consciousness within and regarding one's outer personality from that inner

freedom. These processes have to be worked out by everyone attempting this yoga in their own unique ways and time. And even before these inner processes begin, preparation for yoga can be necessary. To undertake the inner journey to explore one's inner being and apply what one finds in order to change one's nature takes a strong will, an integrated outer personality capable of sustained inner and outer action, and beyond all, an authentic inner call of one's soul to this particular yoga. The consequent Integral Yoga itself might very well be considered a lifetime's work. Nevertheless, the possibility of a fundamental change of the human condition resulting in our ordinary lives changing first into something neither old nor new but transitional and eventually truly *New*—maybe even *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo envisioned—might seem worth all these inner and outer efforts.

Do we find ourselves inclined toward Integral Yoga, its vision and the inner work it entails? If yes, we are welcome to explore the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who originated this yoga and gave detailed explanations and instructions on how to begin. We might also like to visit places dedicated to their works like the Sri Aurobindo Ashrams and Auroville in India and other communities and centers around the world where these demanding long-term processes of inner and outer individual and collective change are attempted. Here also we may find that applied collective research in consciousness is an ongoing work-in-progress subject to unique dynamic processes which might not comply with our personal intellectual ideas about and expectations of it. Far from giving rules and regulations for research that might remind us more of the purely intellectual kind, the Mother said instead, "*I invite you to the great adventure*"—the adventure of consciousness.

MATTHIAS POMMERENING has studied Western and Integral Yoga psychology. Since encountering Sri Aurobindo's writings and the Mother's words 12 years ago, he has carried them with him in his personal life and attempts at Integral Yoga as well as in his academic and professional research and writing. He explores consciousness and energy in Auroville, India. • Images: Elizabeth Teklinski

FEATURES





Harmony in Oneness

MARTHA ORTON

Adapted from the book *Oneness*
(Bloomington: iUniverse, 2013) by the author.

Each generation has its own unique challenges, yet there are some that have repeatedly arisen throughout human history. Conflicts originating from the sense of separateness and division, such as prejudice, racism, and all forms of societal and international conflict are destined to continue until there is a radical change in human nature. The human sense of separateness derives from the ego and is reinforced by the perceptions and interpretations of our limited mentality. We apply this sense of separateness to individuals and also to groupings of all kinds, consequently enabling and even actually fueling conflict at all levels—individual, societal, national, and international. The solution to lasting change lies in changing human nature—a transformation of consciousness—leading



to an understanding, a vision, and ultimately a realization, of the underlying unity that is the reality of our universe. Sri Aurobindo describes the issue with powerful clarity in the final chapter of *The Life Divine*:

Our nature, our consciousness is that of beings ignorant of each other, separated from each other, rooted in a divided ego, who must strive to establish some kind of relation between their embodied ignorances; for the urge to union and forces making for union are there in Nature. Individual and group harmonies of a comparative and qualified completeness are created, a social cohesion is accomplished; but in the mass the relations formed are constantly

marred by imperfect sympathy, imperfect understanding, gross misunderstandings, strife, discord, unhappiness. It cannot be otherwise so long as there is no true union of consciousness founded upon a nature of self-knowledge, inner mutual knowledge, inner realisation of unity, concord of our inner forces of being and inner forces of life.¹

The sense of division that people often feel between themselves and others, and also even within themselves, can be identified as the cause of deep disquiet and the essential cause of external conflict between individuals, societies, and nations. This sense of division persists, even though many of our societal, religious,

ethical, and spiritual belief systems assert the reality of an inherent brotherhood and sisterhood—essentially an underlying Oneness. These same systems generally espouse solutions or advocate structural changes intended to solve the problem, yet the sense of division remains in spite of the efforts of many sincere people through many centuries. Most of the solutions advocate recognition of equality in some way. The admonition to treat others as one would want to be treated oneself, the “Golden Rule” of Christianity, is a prime example of this. The egalitarian ideals of the American Declaration of Independence and the cry of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” of the French Revolution reverberate from the ideals of the Enlightenment’s Age of Reason in America and Europe. In the spiritual traditions of the East, Oneness is asserted as a truth. Nevertheless, the actual realization of Oneness and putting this into practice in life in the world continue to remain serious challenges, ones that can even seem insurmountable.

Yet no amount of belief maintained at the mental level, no amount of idealism expressed however lucidly by the intellect, and no array of egalitarian laws or ethical principles can truly solve the sense of separation and bring about the realization of Oneness. The limitations of our mental operations, along with the influence of the ego, combine to prevent this. Yet it is the realization of Oneness that is the natural extension of the principle of equality. Oneness is its full reality and expression. A lasting knowledge of Oneness can develop only through a deep and integral realization within the inner being of each individual. This full and true knowledge of Oneness can transform the consciousness, and each individual transformation can have the expansive effect of a pebble dropped into a pool, rippling outward, and eventually have a result far beyond its immediate sphere. Only the full realization of Oneness, occurring with transformative effect deep within the being, can end division and conflict and result in a real and lasting harmony.

Inner realization is very much the field of spirituality,

whether Hinduism, Buddhism, mystic Christianity, Sufism, or any other system of belief and practice. The term “yoga” means “union” in Sanskrit, and the purpose of the practice of yoga is to achieve union. If we ask “Union with what?” the answer is simple—with all, everything. This understanding is based on the Hindu concept of Brahman: The divine is all; all is the divine. It is very simple, yet at the same time difficult to realize. There are several significant steps to be taken: (1) to conceive of this at the mental level; (2) to experience this as reality in the inner consciousness; (3) to realize this (i.e., to have the lasting, unwavering experience of this true reality). Rare individuals have attained this realization without initially having any mental conception of Oneness.

Many individuals through the ages have experienced the realization of Oneness as the truth of the universe; some have written about it, many have not. One person who has written with exceptional clarity and wideness of vision on the nature of the reality of Oneness, and the implications of this great truth, is Sri Aurobindo, the great Indian revolutionary, philosopher, poet, sage. This present attempt at writing on the subject of Oneness is based on some of my modest gleanings from his works.

. . .

Throughout his philosophical writing Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the reality of Brahman and explains the implications of this reality. Honoring this as the ancient Vedic realization that the divine is all, and all is the divine, Sri Aurobindo describes the meaning of Brahman with great depth and richness of explanation. In discussing Brahman, writers and thinkers are generally comfortable with referring to it as a concept. Doing so enables discussion of Brahman in language that we know and are adept at using, language that is a common currency, the words familiar to us in philosophical discussion and intellectual discourse. While pointing out quite clearly that Brahman cannot be described at all adequately in the language of our ordinary expression and the language of the mind and its operations, Sri Aurobindo



We cannot grasp Brahman with the mind, though we can progress toward a realization of Brahman through the evolution of consciousness.

nevertheless enlightens us about the reality of Brahman, primarily in his major philosophical work *The Life Divine*. He begins by explaining that Brahman is the reality and then goes on to provide a range of perspectives on what this reality, the reality of Oneness, means in the consciousness and life of humanity. As Sri Aurobindo proceeds through *The Life Divine* to explain the nature of reality and how it manifests in the universe, in matter in the world, and in the lives, vital natures, minds, and souls of humanity, he progressively reveals a deeper understanding of Brahman, the reality of Oneness, and the implications of this truth.

Brahman, being the one reality, is then obviously much more than a concept. As Sri Aurobindo explains, we cannot grasp Brahman with the mind, though we can progress toward a *realization* of Brahman through the evolution of consciousness. Realization, in this sense, is more than experience, though it is preceded by experiences of that which, in its fullness, become realization. While experiences are intermittent, realization is an enduring state, which has transforming effect. In the course of our spiritual development we can aspire to unite with the divine and realize true Oneness. Spiritual development is not, as such, a mental process. Ideally it engages all aspects of the being, as Sri Aurobindo describes in his conceptualization of Integral Yoga. Nevertheless, grasping a mental conception of Brahman can have an impact on life and development.

This is so because we tend to base our thought and actions on our understanding of reality. This simple fact is the basis of many of our problems and also provides an inroad to solving them.

Many human problems emanate from the sense of separation and division. We see this virtually everywhere. The prevailing view of individuality is that I am me and you are you and that this distinction is necessary for self-preservation and the maintenance of identity. This sense of separation at the individual level is carried forward to other social distinctions, such as ethnicity and nationality. For it to be otherwise can seem undesirable, perhaps even threatening in some way or, in any case, impossible. When we consider trying to operate according to other premises, problems arise in our thinking. Among these are understandable fears of the consequences of superficial attempts at unity, including the disastrous consequences resulting from totalitarianism. We fear a loss of individuality, which we understandably see as a threat to our identity. We also often make the mistake of equating unity with uniformity. If we can grasp, even initially at the intellectual level, the reality of Oneness and the true meaning of this reality, we can come to understand that unity is inherent in the manifestation—Earth, humankind, universe, all of it—and that this unity is the fabric of all that is real to us, including the vast variety and range of individuality of humankind. There is Oneness within, which emerges in a multitude of forms and expressions, which is not



Even without having the full realization of the divine Oneness, many have a sense of its reality, perhaps having had a glimpse of this truth, which then makes an enduring difference in their lives and vision.

threatened or changed by individual existence, expression, and variety, and does not require absorption or annihilation of the individual's distinctness. This Oneness can be lived, experienced fully, delighted in, while one continues to be oneself. It is the change in perspective, the realization of Oneness, which can enable this.

From the days of the ancient Vedic sages and their conception of Brahman up to the present day, there are those who believe that there is a deep underlying unity in all existence—that all is truly one and, moreover, that all this Oneness is divine. This profound understanding derives from the conception of the creation, in which the Absolute, through its power of *sachchidananda*, created the universe as an extension of Itself. Consequently, the universe and all in it, even matter itself, exists within the divine reality, being fully contained within it. This means that the world is essentially not a fragmented place, and that in its essence it is not dark and conflicted, but rather there is an inherent harmony, unity, divinity. If we accept that this is so, then everything we observe and experience is a manifestation, an expression, of the true divinity within. The belief in this divine Oneness comes to us from those who have realized it. We find this realization described in the Vedas—especially in the Upanishads, their ending portions—and in the literature of spiritual mystics in other traditions.

Creation stories from many cultural traditions resonate with similar themes describing a divine origin for the universe and conceiving of it as a unity. Furthermore, many who have not actually realized the divine Oneness believe in it or want to believe that it is so. Even without having the full realization of the divine Oneness, many have a sense of its reality, perhaps having had a glimpse of this truth, which then makes an enduring difference in their lives and vision. In any case, the reality of a divine Oneness is something that has resonance within and offers an appealing sense of promise that the world, and our lives in it, have the potential to be much more, much finer and better than they appear to be.

To attempt to write of Brahman is a virtual impossibility, except for those enlightened by experiencing it and who also have the capacity to use language with exceptional effectiveness. Therefore, turning directly to Sri Aurobindo, we can consider here some of what he has revealed to us. For example, at the beginning of Chapter V, "The Destiny of the Individual," in *The Life Divine*, he writes:

An omnipresent Reality is the truth of all life and existence whether absolute or relative, whether corporeal or incorporeal, whether animate or inanimate, whether intelligent or unintelligent; and in all its infinitely varying and





even constantly opposed self-expressions, from the contradictions nearest to our ordinary experience to those remotest antinomies which lose themselves on the verges of the Ineffable, the Reality is one and not a sum or concourse. From that all variations begin, in that all variations consist, to that all variations return. All affirmations are denied only to lead to a wider affirmation of the same Reality. All antinomies confront each other in order to recognize one Truth in their opposed aspects and embrace by the way of conflict their mutual Unity. Brahman is the Alpha and the Omega. Brahman is the One besides whom there is nothing else existent.²

Sri Aurobindo tells us that everything is Brahman. Such an understanding exceeds mental comprehension. Instead, we are accustomed to seeing many

separate and distinct things when we look out of ourselves into the world. All that we perceive is distinct from ourselves and therefore other than ourselves. We can ask ourselves: How can this all be One? We can further define this question in terms of understanding the distinction between diversity and uniformity. Essentially we seek to grasp how so much variety can participate in any kind of unity.

Moreover, when we are told that this One in which all that exists is actually divine, even *the* Divine, it can seem even more improbable. This is especially problematic when we consider conceptions of good and evil, right and wrong. How can all of this fit into the idea that all is one and that this one is the divine. The problem also arises for all of us when we experience not only the goodness and pleasure in the world, which we can more easily associate with our idea of the divine, but when we experience pain and

suffering. We understandably question how this can be divine also, or how God can do such things to us. This shares an affinity with questioning how things that are so different from each other can all be divine. We can perhaps agree that the bird of paradise is divine, but what about the wolf or rattlesnake? So there is also the problem of value, including our personal likes and dislikes and perceptions of good and evil. We see variation and divergence in the value of things and experiences, some seem good and others not so, perhaps even the opposite and contrary to our conception of the divine as all good and as perfect. These are challenges to our thinking, which obstruct our conception of the reality of Brahman.

Human beings actually have an innate sense of Oneness, although we do not generally take an objective view of these perceptions and identify them as such. Sri Aurobindo enlightens us about this in the first chapter of *The Life Divine*, in which he explains, “all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony.”³ He makes this assertion based on the understanding that an innate sense of unity is contained within human consciousness and that, consequently, we are uncomfortable with all that appears to go counter to the truth of unity and its expression as harmony. Writing of our human problems, he states:

They arise from the perception of an unsolved discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity. To rest content with an unsolved discord is possible for the practical and more animal part of man, but impossible for his fully awakened mind, and usually even his practical parts only escape from the general necessity either by shutting out the problem or by accepting a rough, utilitarian and unilluminated compromise. For essentially, all Nature seeks a harmony, life and matter in their own sphere as much as mind in the arrangement of its perceptions.⁴

The essential points that Sri Aurobindo reveals to us are that harmony is an expression of unity, that human beings have an inherent sense of unity, and

that therefore we seek to achieve this in our lives and actions. Harmony, by definition, is a comfortable and acceptable state for us. It implies serenity and balance. When we can also understand that harmony represents the truth of unity, we can better understand why we are so uncomfortable with disharmony and discord that we generally cannot accept these and work to resolve problems and conflicts. Doing so can be seen as expression of our deep instinct for unity. Sri Aurobindo explains that we inherently value harmony to such a great extent that we are actually motivated by discord: “The greater the apparent disorder of the materials offered or the apparent disparateness, even to irreconcilable opposition, of the elements that have to be utilized, the stronger is the spur.”⁵ We can understand from this perspective that harmony is the desired state of existence for us, particularly since nature itself seeks harmony and we, as beings of nature, are uncomfortable with any other state. Seeing this as an expression of the underlying unity of the manifest existence, we can reflect that our attraction to harmony indicates an awareness of Oneness within our consciousness. It is particularly meaningful that this awareness presents itself even at the level of the conscious mind, the level that is considered the most superficial.

Along with considering the deep truth of Oneness, which we can approach from the philosophical and spiritual perspective, we can also reflect on our daily usual experience and, in doing so, may feel confounded by the conflicting apparent realities before us. However, the situation is actually much better than it initially may seem, for not only is the sense of Oneness within us, but we actually experience it regularly. Our search for harmony, the drive to attain it and eliminate discord, is an outward symbol and expression of the inner recognition of unity. In seeking harmony, we are striving to discover and reveal the true inherent unity.

Perhaps the clearest examples of the sense of Oneness experienced within human beings are to be found in our relations with others. When we speak with someone about a topic that is important to us and find them in agreement with our point of view, we generally feel



For the real knowledge of Oneness to be achieved, the ego needs to be transcended or dissolved and a complete change of consciousness needs to be realized—a transformation of consciousness into the realization of Oneness and union.

calm and content and may even experience feelings of elation in finding someone we consider to be a kindred soul. Oneness is even more evident as expressed simply, yet powerfully, through our feelings of empathy for others. A striking example of the power of empathy can be seen in the demonstrations for racial justice by people of all races in many countries around the world. Most individuals resonate with emotional connection when we observe the events in the lives of other people. We generally feel at least some degree of happiness when we hear that a friend has had some good news and also sadness or grief when something unfortunate happens to someone we know or care about. Most of us even respond this way in relation to events in the lives of strangers. We could not do this if we did not have an inner connection with others. This inner resonance is a very real indication of the Oneness within humanity. In fact, this inner connection is so real, and such an important presence in human life, that we even respond to the feelings of fictional people, such as characters in novels, films and on television. Sometimes these emotional responses are even more freely felt, because in watching a fictional drama unfold our usual social defenses are relaxed and we may be less guarded in our emotions.

As an extension of this inner connection, which we recognize at the emotional level, our acts of kindness

and consideration are concrete evidence of the sense of Oneness felt deep within. Every time someone helps another, this is a recognition of Oneness and an action based upon it. The myriad charitable organizations all around the world are vivid examples. Consequently, we actually live in a very present acceptance of Oneness as a reality, though we may not recognize it consciously as such. In addition, the religions and belief systems of the world generally do consciously subscribe to belief in the Oneness of humanity, albeit to varying degrees and expressed in different terms. While some may make distinctions between believers and nonbelievers of a specific religion, adding a hierarchical element to the equation, most nevertheless see people as being closely inter-linked in relationship. Frequently the word “brotherhood” is used, although the language now is often updated to make clear the intention to include all people equally, without regard to gender.

Regardless of how it is conceived or described, it is this sense of connection that is an expression of the true inner Oneness. When this truth is acted upon in daily life, harmony prevails as the result of people recognizing the value of each other and treating each other with respect and consideration. When this truth is ignored in the heat of anger or simply forgotten through ego-centrism, then conflict is the result. We could not have war or racism, if the true recognition of

Oneness prevailed. It is our unconsciousness of Oneness that causes so much of our misery in life. It is the false sense of separateness that enables us to see individuals other than ourselves, families other than our own, societies or races or countries other than ours, as “the other,” as distinctly separate from us and therefore in a different category altogether from that in which we place ourselves. To the extent that we feel any of these are separate from us, we are out of the consciousness of Oneness and, consequently, conflict and all the falsehood and misery associated with it have a wide-open opportunity to enter. It is *us* versus *them* and anything goes. At least it can, and often it does.

We feel satisfaction when a quarrel is resolved; we rejoice when war is avoided; we generally find comfort in the ending of war and all forms of conflict. Even if we have lost, we may feel some sense of relief. In any case, we seek the reestablishment of equilibrium, so that there can be positive experience, forward movement, in life. Conflict, no matter how unavoidable or necessary it may seem, has a retrograde quality, in that it means that some kind of problem has to be resolved before balance can be restored, before harmony can be discovered again, before life can move forward progressively once more. When we read news of the world and learn about conflict and suffering, whether close to us or far from our own lives, we feel disquiet and want to see these problems resolved, feeling discomfort with conflict and concern for others, hoping for their safety and relief. When we experience a sense of harmony within ourselves, with others, or with our surrounding environment, this brings peace and joy within us. We feel closer to the divine.

All these experiences and emotions are tastes of Oneness.

All are experiences of the reality of Brahman—Brahman experienced within and without ourselves, here, there, and everywhere, pervading and encompassing all.

If we accept that human beings have an innate sense of Oneness and actually show that they value and seek this through actions in their daily lives, through their pursuit of harmony and their disquiet with conflict, and are indeed motivated by experiences of disharmony to work harder to achieve harmony, then we may ask why there is still so much division, conflict, sense of separation in human life. We can consider ego, assisted by the limitations of the mind, as the culprit here. Although the ego served an important role earlier in our human development through enabling individuation, it later on becomes the obstacle. The mind supports the ego’s sense of importance and usually opposes any attempts at giving it a lesser role. In fact, as Sri Aurobindo describes the mind’s operations, it excels at seeing things in their parts, in separateness, and is adept at analysis and synthesis, but not capable of true knowledge.

Consequently, for the real knowledge of Oneness to be achieved, the ego needs to be transcended or dissolved and a complete change of consciousness needs to be realized—a transformation of consciousness into the realization of Oneness and union. We can find hope within our aspiration for harmony, and in the inherent divinity of the human soul, that one day Oneness will be integrally realized in the outer life of humanity. In his conceptualization of the evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo envisions humanity as having the potential for this complete realization and fulfillment.

NOTES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 22 (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2005), p. 1071.
2. Ibid. vol. 21, p. 38.
3. Ibid. p. 4.
4. Ibid.

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Marriage of Soil and Soul

A study of ecospirituality in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*

SARANI GHOSAL MONDAL

Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* has been popularly known as the "idiom of America" because of its vast canvas, which includes the individual, the mass, the nation, history, and culture. A poet of the populace, his all-embracing vision culminates into Whitmanesque mysticism, which advocates the integration of apparently contradictory things and absorption of the whole. "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it" Whitman wrote in the 1855 preface of *Leaves of Grass*. In the process of this poetic absorption, he drinks the nectar of the earth and bestows himself to the dirt to grow from the grass he loves. It obliquely refers to his sincere concern for and commitment to the environment. This is not quite the approach of his illustrious contemporary, Henry David Thoreau. The rhetoric of protest is almost absent in Whitman's poems. He imbibes the spirit of nature as a mystic. Nature also teaches him lessons of humility and camaraderie, and that elevates him to a cosmic identification: the marriage of the soul and soil culminating into ecospirituality.



The poet bestows himself to the grass and asks us to look for him under our boot-soles. Such a gesture may be described as an example of the utmost humility.

Whitman, as a poet of environment, had anticipated the principles of both the first and second waves of ecocriticism much before the beginning of the systematic approach initiated by the critics in the second half of the 20th century. The first wave of it is characterized by a concern for the environment, nature writing, and wilderness. The second wave deals with sociocentric initiatives like clean city projects, garbage disposal, and other identical problems. Lawrence Buell, in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, aptly clarifies the differences of approach in the first and second waves, respectively. The critics of the first wave were concerned more with the landscape and less with the anthropogenic pollution:

Writers such as Thoreau and Wordsworth, who were the darlings of first-wave environmental criticism, are somewhat less interesting to the second wave. Not surprisingly, second-wave environmental critics, careful not to overly romanticize wilderness (as did many of their predecessors), are more likely to direct themselves to sites of environmental devastation and texts that do the same, such as Carson's *Silent Spring*. While some first-wave environmental critics might cringe at the thought, a study of the celebration of flowers in Romantic poetry may be of far less interest to the second wave than an assessment of A.R. Ammons's book-length poem *Garbage*.

The present paper seeks to explore Whitman's ecological conscience and his biophilic relation as depicted in *Leaves of Grass* and in some essays of *Specimen Days* concerning the diverse tenets of deep ecology, especially humanistic ecology and ecospirituality, which hints at an integration of nature and man.

Whitman, as a poet of the environment, romances with nature like the critics of the first wave. But in "The Compost" he foresees the doctrines of the second wave, which observe that the earth absorbs all our waste and new life sprouts from it—the cycle of life is dependent on nature; the soil recycles the waste and gives life to it. However, the importance of nature in human life has always been there, from ancient times to the Romantic era. In the post-Romantic period, there was not enough concern for nature due to the Industrial Revolution, followed by a departure from the country to the city. "High modernism announced its death."¹ And much before the emergence of the Earth First! Movement, green thinking was part of the American consciousness. Lawrence Buell, in the introduction to his book *The Environmental Imagination*, says that pastoral ideology is central to American cultural self-understanding. According to him, it is a return to a less urbanized and more natural state of existence, and activates green consciousness. In addition, nature plays a crucial part in the sociocultural history of America as exemplified by Washington Irving's celebrated nonfiction about the environment. Irving's frontier trilogy on the

prairies and the fur trade was a huge commercial success.

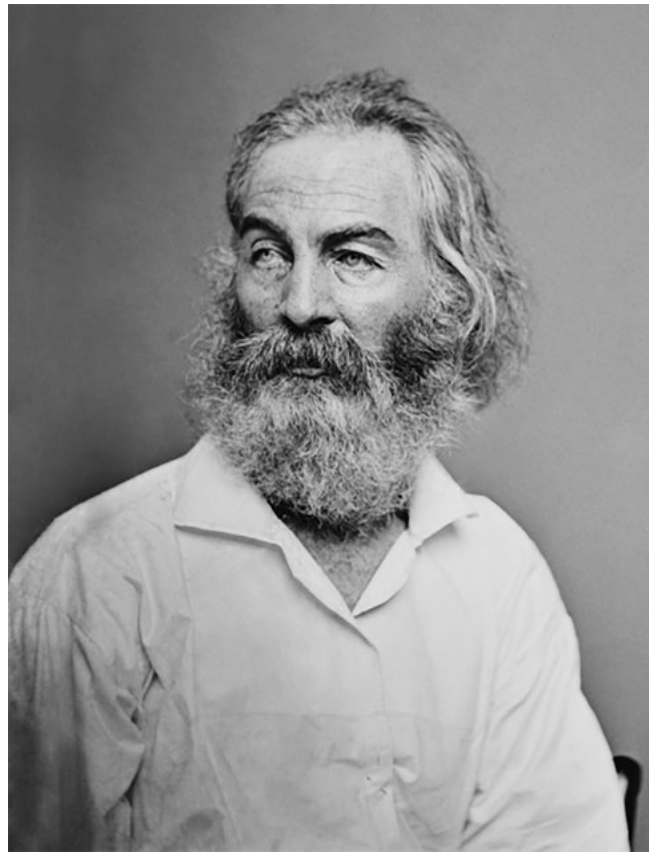
Later, H. D. Thoreau and Walt Whitman started their campaign in their distinctive ways. Thoreau's *Walden* is often considered the foundational work of American "ecocentered" writing. Thoreau hoped to renew himself by embracing a simple way of life for two years (1845–1847) in the forest of Concord, Massachusetts. *Walden and Civil Disobedience* is the result of his contemplations and philosophical reflection of the essential things in life. Buell calls him "The patron saint of American environment writing."² He further elaborates upon Thoreau's pilgrimage in the forest:

"*Walden* remains Thoreau's most enduring work but also because it embeds much of the history of his thinking about the natural environment as it unfolded from his apprentice years to his full maturity ... *Walden* both as product and as process"³

Buell's argument highlights that *Walden* documents the inner growth of a person through experiential knowledge in proximity to nature. It is also a record of economic and spiritual experiments. Whitman's approach in *Leaves of Grass* is relatively broader than that of Thoreau as it is his contemplation about the entire ecosphere in the form of poetry. *Leaves of Grass* is a projection of his biophilic relation with the environment. At the same time, it is a celebration of the entire landscape, skyscape, and cityscape. Whitman's broad-sweeping vision moves from the local to global. In contrast, Thoreauvian pilgrimage is limited to bioregionalism—the surrounding of Walden Pond in Concord. The pastoral setting of the place was a peaceful retreat for the contemporary transcendentalist thinkers, who envisioned a greener earth.

Unlike Thoreau, Whitman starts his journey from the grass, which culminates into a grand cosmic vision encompassing the whole:

This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is, / This the common air that bathes the globe.



Walt Whitman

The image of grass is a crucial metaphor for his ecopoetics. His green vision starts with a simple symbol of humility, hope, and regeneration.

O suns—O grass of graves—O perpetual transfers
and promotions ...

A bare and gray landscape is never so appealing to our eyes. One always prefers to see it dotted with green patches. The grass is a multidimensional metaphor in the Whitmanesque context. We tread over and trample the green carpet underneath without realizing its value. In "Song of Myself" the poet equates it with the Lord's handkerchief dropped as a blessing. The poet bestows himself to the grass and asks us to look for him under our boot-soles. Such a gesture may be described as an example of the utmost humility.

In "The Compost" the poet discusses the renewing power of nature. Harold Aspiz aptly summarizes the message of it: "Since compost is a universal nutrient,

he also beholds this compost as an element in nature's renewing and transformative powers and, paradoxically, as a promise of universal immortality."⁴ The poem is written in a contrasting note, which captures an ongoing conflict in the mind of the poet. He wavers between his belief in the regenerative power of nature, and his trauma of death and destruction. In a series of rhetorical questions, he wishes to know how the earth generates new life continuously for ages:

O how can the ground not sicken?
 How can you be alive, you growths of spring?
 How can you furnish health, you blood of herbs,
 roots, orchards, grain?
 Are they not continually putting distemper'd
 corpses in you?
 ...
 Where have you disposed of their carcasses?
 ...
 Where have you drawn off all the foul liquid and
 meat?
 ...
 I am sure I shall expose some of the foul meat.
 Behold this compost! behold it well!
 Perhaps every mite has once form'd part of a sick

person—Yet behold!
 The grass covers the prairies,
 The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in
 the garden,
 The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward,
 The apple-buds cluster together on the apple-
 branches,
 The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale
 visage out of its graves,
 ...
 It renews with such unwitting looks, its prodigal,
 annual, sumptuous crops,
 It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts
 such leavings from them at last.

According to Aspiz, the natural vegetation of earth refers to spiritual immortality. The continuous cycle of life and death in nature gives him hope and assurance of rebirth. A similar theme is evident in his poetic prose "The Common Earth, The Soil"—where he observes the worms wriggling out of the ground, the dead leaves lying scattered, the incipient grass growing amidst all these as there is a life latent underneath the soil.

In the Calamus section, he talks of another variety of

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grass, the long, aromatic, and dark green leaves of calamus grass, which become a symbol of camaraderie, en masse, and democracy. The expressions like “manly attachment” in the first poem of Calamus may appear to be intriguing to the critics and readers. However, he means something beyond that as he envisions a sturdy and athletic race united by brotherly affection without any malice and hatred as that will strengthen the nation. Critics like John Addington Symonds inquired if he had portrayed homoerotic sentiment in the poems of Calamus. In response, the poet explained that he meant pure comradeship, which he describes as “the adhesive love”:

I will make the most splendid race the sun ever
shone upon ...
I will plant companionship thick as trees along all
the rivers of America ...
I will make inseparable cities with arms about
each other's necks, ...
For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve
you ma femme!

These lines are from “For You O Democracy” depicting the poet’s determination to create a race worthy of serving the Mother (earth/nation). It may appear to be problematic from the mundane angle to decipher Whitman’s cryptic message about the multidimensional symbol of grass. The poet, as a seer and prophet, wishes to rebuild his nation on a premise of love and inseparable friendship. He repeats the same message in a short lyric called “The Prairie-Grass Dividing,” where he demands men to rise and act with freedom in close companionship, by which he means that they should work as compatriots. The recurring metaphor of grass then dissolves into his unique concept of democracy, where every individual, like a blade of grass, is as important as the cluster or the mass. In “Salut au Monde” he moves from the individual to the mass, then to the cosmos. There is a spiritual dimension to it. His notion of democracy is not limited to the sphere of political or territorial democracy. It is a spiritual democracy founded on the ground of brotherhood and cosmic consciousness:

What widens within you Walt Whitman?

...

What do you see Walt Whitman?

...

I see a great round wonder rolling through space,

...

I see the shaded part on one side where the
sleepers are sleeping,

...

And I salute all the inhabitants of the earth

Sri Aurobindo’s comments on Whitman in *The Future Poetry* rightly explain the broad and catholic vision of the poet: “this spiritual crowned athlete and vital prophet of democracy, liberty and the soul of man and Nature and all humanity.”⁵

The critics often misread Whitman’s ecological conscience because he supported the developmental projects in “Passage to India.” In reviewing “Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics” by M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Peter J. Bellis highlights Killingsworth’s argument that as a poet Whitman “swings between local and global.”⁶ He also comments that Whitman, in his postwar poem “Passage to India” speaks in favor of the ideology of national progress, which includes the three epoch-making initiatives like the opening of the Suez Canal, the establishment of transcontinental railroads, and the laying of the Atlantic and Pacific cables. Killingsworth obliquely refers to the anthropocentric gesture of Whitman. However, Whitman’s broad vision lies beyond this material progress:

To Traubel, Walt Whitman said, referring to “Passage to India”: “There’s more of me, the essential ultimate me, in that than in any of the poems.”⁷

It is difficult to accept Killingsworth’s argument because Whitman reconciles this dichotomy of local and global as he imagines universal brotherhood and oneness, which obliterate the apparent anthropocentric gesture in “Passage to India.” The poet wishes to undertake a passage to more than India:

Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou

with me,
 For we are bound where mariner has not yet
 dared to go,
 And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
 O my brave soul!
 O farther farther sail

Whitman's ecocentric writing concentrates both on the urbanspace and ruralspace, which ultimately has a limit-transcending thrust. According to Pramod K. Nayar, "ecocriticism originates in a bio-social context of unrestrained capitalism, excessive exploitation of nature worrying definitions and shapes of development."⁸ Timothy Burberry takes the argument further and cites from Buell's *The Future of Environmental Criticism* to explain ecocentrism: "the interest of the ecosphere must override that of the interest of the individual species."⁹ Both Nayar and Buell advocate that unrestricted utilization of natural resources will pose a threat to humanity. There must be a ban on over-usage for the benefit of humankind. One may also counter argue that human beings can replenish the earth by taking up green initiatives like afforestation and green technology. The garden city concept of Lewis Mumford is one such project to restore ecological balance and communion as it advocates the establishment of self-contained communities surrounded by greenbelts so that there will be an environmental interrelatedness with a turn toward ecological humanism. Humanity is capable of saving this planet. The humanistic ecologists believe in inclusiveness. Whitman, as a humanist, is both empathetic and committed to nature.

Critics like Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier (1998) suggest another dimension to it in the context of developing countries, where ecological degradation is accepted as the land is scarce for the poor. Many a time it is observed that the underprivileged people are evicted from areas they had been occupying for centuries for projects like wildlife conservation. The controversial Sardar Sarovar Dam project on the Narmada River is one such example where we see that the developmental initiatives do not address the issues of livelihood of the tribal people, who depend entirely on the natural resources.

According to them, the model of "first world" environmentalism is not relevant in a country like India because of the problem of social inequality. The policymakers in India ignore the rights of those living in the margin. In contrast, one may find large tracts of land in Canada and the U.S., which lie either unused or unaffected by human use. They are used for the protection of wilderness and also offer a premise for the discourse on deep ecology.¹⁰ Considering this, one may deconstruct Killingworth's argument by saying that some developmental projects as celebrated by Whitman are a necessity for the nation as they indicate connectivity on a grand scale; simultaneously the refurbishment projects are also essential to compensate the loss or damage done to the environment or the species on account of such initiatives.

The broad vision of the poet overshoots this conflict and takes a keen interest in all the aspects of this creation. This affinity makes him realize the essence of our existence, that is, to explore the primal bond with nature:

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool
 night,
 Ya-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like
 an invitation,
 The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I
 listening close,
 Find its purpose and place up there towards the
 wintry sky.
 ...
 I see in them and myself the same old law
 The press of my foot to the earth springs a
 hundred affections ("Song of Myself")

He has reiterated the same message in the prose of *Specimen Days*:

returning to the naked source-life of us all—
 to the breast of the great silent savage all-
 acceptive Mother. Alas! How many of us are
 so sodden—how many have wander'd so far
 away, that return is almost impossible.

Nature, to Whitman, is a source of sustenance. It

provides shelter and offers strength to humanity, and therefore, in “The Lesson of a Tree,” he uses a series of adjectives to personify her. She is a voiceless companion, a great sympathizer, silent strength, and highest beauty. He obliquely criticizes our anthropocentric attitude to nature.

. . .

Anthropogenic pollution is an ongoing phenomenon. Human beings have been exploiting nature for their comforts. The rapid pace of urbanization has encroached on the habitat of different species—the 4G/5G technology is a threat to the birds as they cannot bear the radiation of the cell phone towers. There is no end to human greed, which has assumed an apocalyptic proportion resulting in an imbalance in the ecosystem. The consequences of excessive human interferences are frequent floods, pandemics, respiratory disease, extinction of over-hunted species, and other allied human-made disasters. To counterbalance environmental degradation, the concept of deep ecology was introduced a few decades ago. Whitman had anticipated this disaster much earlier, as he cautions us (in the passage cited above) that one should not go so far out that the return-track is lost or the return is “almost impossible.” His prescriptive comment went unheeded in the present era as a result of which the whole world is crippled by the fear of repeated pandemics.

The ancient Indian scriptures, centuries ago, had also hinted at the consequences of prolonged anthropogenic pollution without any reconstructive projects. The metaphor of *ahimsa* or nonviolence is an essential principle of existence in the scriptural context. An article in Shodhganga (a repository of theses by Indian scholars) titled “Ecological Balance According to Ancient Scriptures” discusses an ecological discourse in *Rigveda*, which argues that trees are sacred because of their medicinal properties and healing power. Planting trees was considered a religious activity. Mandala 10, hymn 97 of *Rigveda* is called the “Praise of Herbs” and 23 verses in this hymn have been devoted to herbs.¹¹ The following three verses (6, 7, 8) highlight this ancient Indian wisdom:

He who hath store of Herbs at hand like Kings
amid a crowd of men,—
Physician is that sage’s name, fiend-slayer, chaser
of disease.
Herbs rich in Soma, rich in steeds, in nourish-
ments, in strengthening power,—
All these have I provided here, that this man may
be whole again.

The healing virtues of the Plants stream forth like
cattle from the stall,—
Plants that shall win me store of wealth, and save
thy vital breath, O man.

Humanity has already lent a deaf ear to these scriptural sayings. Violence toward voiceless nature is a common instinct among human beings.

. . .

The equating of nature with an “all-acceptive Mother” figure relates to ecofeminism. It is based on an underlying assumption that men equally exploit both women and nature. Ecofeminists suggest that the primary task of “nature is to sustain and provide for the human race.”¹² It has a large canvas, which includes both women and nonhuman entities:

Any issue that helps somehow to comprehend
the torment of women, non-human creatures or
nature, may be treated as an ecofeminist
issue.¹³

Calling nature as Mother would quickly resolve all the conflicts, which Whitman had known intuitively: “the fact of women’s procreative capacity is itself the source of a biological tie with nature’s life-giving processes.”¹⁴ That is why he calls the nation Mother, which has already been discussed in the context of democracy.

Whitman may also be seen as a cultural nationalist because he celebrates the entire continent. According to Eric Taylor Woods in his article “Cultural Nationalism: A Review and Annotated Bibliography” cultural nationalism deals with the process of nation-building. The territorial boundary and political



Nature is Whitman's religion. His sincere concern for it is a matter of profound realization. Like Wordsworth, Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo, he feels the presence of the "Mighty Being" immanent in every single aspect, and he refers to his experiences both in prose and poetry like a mystic.

supremacy are not enough for the progress of a nation. The citizens need to adhere to its culture, which includes the races, flora, fauna, landscape, language, music, and poetry:

"Cultural nationalism is focused on the cultivation of a nation. Here the vision of the nation is not a political organisation, but a moral community. As such, cultural nationalism sets out to provide a vision of the nation's identity, history and destiny. The key agents of cultural nationalism are intellectuals and artists, who seek to convey their vision of the nation to the wider community."

Whitman's all-inclusive vision rejects nothing. As a poet of the nation, he believes in complete absorption of every small aspect. In his characteristic poetic description of mullein plants in the section *Mulleins and Mulleins in Specimen Days*, he states that nothing in nature is unworthy and that "every object has its lesson." The soft yellow mullein flowers glitter in the summer sun and the happy sight of it brings back sanity in him, and they rehabilitate his mood. The sound of nature's music is also intoxicating to him. The rustling sound of the wind through the leaves and bushes makes him cheerful. The liquid-simple melody of meadowlark enraptures him. The description of

corn stalks in the farms is indicative of prosperity and abundance. He collects a handful of flossy-silky balsam from the bursting pods of wild cotton for its exotic aroma. He sits by the gurgling brook in the company of kingfishers, dragonflies, hummingbirds, and butterflies. "I appreciated and absorb'd their vitality, spirituality, faithfulness, and the rapid vanishing."¹⁵ Proximity to nature exalts his spirit and makes him contemplative. He feels complete in himself.

The essay "Wild Flowers" enlists the available wild flora in the continent in a typical Whitmanesque way. It is a diary entry of the flowers he came across during his nature walk in all the seasons, which suffices his claim in the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves*. The poetic self is immersed in the entire nonhuman world. In "The Oaks and I" he describes the healing power of nature. The forest of Oaks nurtures his sickness. "How it is I know not, but I often realize a presence here ... I am certain of it, and neither chemistry nor reasoning nor esthetics will give the least explanation. All the past two summers it has been strengthening and nourishing my sick body and soul, as never before." Nature is his constant companion, and its "mighty whisper" helps him look inward in search of a greater truth.¹⁶ Nature elevates his consciousness above the ordinary.

Whitman's ecological conscience takes on a spiritual dimension. His sojourn in the wilderness as a solitary singer is a rhythmic journey of self-discovery. He returns to the essence of his being in the green hermitage by a brook bordered with wildflowers. The egoistic self of the poet merges with the environment. In his online essay "Ecospirituality" Steven Rockefeller defines it as "an appreciation of the miracle of life and of the beauty and mystery in the being of animals, plants, and the Earth as a whole becomes so intense as to generate a keen sense of the natural world's sacredness. This awareness of the inner mystery of life is at the heart of most religions." Nature is Whitman's religion. His sincere concern for it is a matter of profound realization. Like Wordsworth, Tagore, and Sri Aurobindo, he feels the presence of the "Mighty Being" immanent in every single aspect, and he refers to his experiences both in prose and poetry like a mystic. In the essay "The Gates Opening" he obliquely hints that he has "the indication of it" and he feels an absolute solitude around him. Again in "Sundown Lights" he says:

I have particular spots where I get these effects in their perfection ... among the trees and along the grass as the sun lowers, give effects more and more peculiar, more and more superb, unearthly, rich and dazzling.

It is a mystical experience of the poet. Descriptions of such esoteric experiences are there in his poetry too. William James in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* describes four prominent characteristics of mystic realization: Ineffability, Noetic Quality, Transiency, and Passivity. By "ineffability" he means that it is inexpressible, "it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words." Next is "noetic quality," meaning revelations and illuminations, "states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect." By "transiency" he says that the mystical experience cannot be sustained for long. The final one is "passivity," which demands a mystic to surrender to a power beyond his individualistic consciousness. Jacques De Marquette explains that it is difficult for mystics to convey their experiences with

precision.¹⁷ There is a suddenness in such experiences. In a moment of inspiration, the mystic realizes something more significant and deeper than the mundane. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" we see that the description moves upward from the river and busy ferry to a cosmic identification, followed by a realization of the supreme in the twilight, which is more profound than what we usually know as a mystical experience:

I loved well those cities, loved well the stately
and rapid river,
The men and women I saw were all near to me,
...
River and sunset and scallop-edg'd waves of
flood-tide?
The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-
boat in the twilight, and the belated lighter?
...
Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what
you are,
You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul,
About my body for me, and your body for you, be
hung out divinest aromas,

The "Song of the Open Road" also describes the expansion of his psyche: "I inhale great draughts of space."

According to Ned Hettinger in the essay "Ecospirituality: First Thoughts" ecospirituality is a passive encounter of natural sights, which produce thrill and ecstasy, a kind of quasi-religious experience, which is majestic. Such experiences make him humble and grateful. He further argues that an ecospiritualist has to remember that this earth is our home and creator. "It provides us the sustenance of our existence. It ties us with other forms of life and individuals by bonds of kinship: all of us are offsprings of the same earth parent." What Hettinger calls a "quasi-religious" experience is primarily a spiritual experience in the Whitmanesque context. Whitman is aware of this vital lesson of existence and he is full of admiration. The poet persona expands with a gesture of deep love and respect for all because it is divine and fulfilling to him. As an ecospiritualist, he asks us to look down on the



Whitman's call to loaf with the grass may save this planet from further degradation as it will restore the earth-connection bridging the soil and soul.

grass to rediscover ourselves. The ever-growing and spanning grass across the continent is a message of humility, camaraderie, optimism, regeneration, democracy, equality, and limitlessness. Earth is always green to his evergreen vision. Through the grass, he establishes a rapport with the cosmos:

Loaf with me on the grass, loose the stop from
your throat, Not words, not music or rhyme I
want, not custom or lecture, not even the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved
voice. ("Song of Myself")

Donald P. St. John in "Whitman's Ecological Spirituality" aptly summarizes the typical Whitmanesque spirituality, which is also a cosmic identification or oneness and that starts with his attachment toward the blades of grass:

Whitman is led to this wider communion with the divine, human and natural orders. Rather than losing touch with external reality, however, in an inner trance, he sees clearly the limitless array of leaves, brown ants, wells, mossy scabs, heap'd stones and plants. The basic attraction between body and soul becomes then for Whitman a revelation of and participation in the larger dynamics of the cosmos. Like the gravity that pulls all together, a person is pulled into union with others.

This attachment to earth grows deeper with each successive edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman lived

and sustained the mystical spirit from the 1855 edition to the last edition in 1891. When William James says that mystical experience is transient, one may find it difficult to accept in the context of Whitman as he is a born mystic, whose realization has evolved to oneness as he grew into maturity. Such genuine attachment to the environment is rare today. Greed has increased so much that humanity does not think twice before striking the blow of an axe. The rapid urbanization has engulfed Whitman's favorite meadow. The wild birds are lost forever. The sound of whispering wind and the gurgling brook is replaced with the sound of electronic music. The result of this anthropogenic pollution is global warming, gripping pandemic, and extinction of different species. We do not think twice before innovating new technology. Humility before nature is unimaginable. Whitman's call to loaf with the grass may save this planet from further degradation as it will restore the earth-connection bridging the soil and soul.

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows
("Leisure" by W.H. Davies)

In India, writers like Jiddu Krishnamurthy and Sisirkumar Ghose have responded to the calls of the Romantics and the American Transcendentalists to save the planet by saving nature, impelled by the

suicidal drives in man to prioritize technology over the environment and to spit into the water we drink. "The Ganga near Calcutta has more of hemlock than holy" writes Sisirkumar Ghose in the preface of his book *Meditation on Matricide: Some Ecological Essays*. Afraid of the imbalance created by man between technology and nature, Ghose expresses his despair: "The City might go up in flames any moment. Its citizens do not sleep."

Less tense and more meditative than Ghose, Jiddu Krishnamurthy raises the same alarm when he sees man's cruelty against nature at every walk of life. "In the woods and groves where man kills rabbits, pheasants, squirrels, there's quite a different atmosphere. You are

entering into a world where man has been, with his gun and peculiar violence."¹⁸ And nature does not welcome you there. Krishnamurthy loves nature the way Whitman does, taking the whole of it, even the "perfumes" of the grass and leaves. As Whitman says in "Scented Herbage of My Breast": "O I do not know whether many passing by you will discover you or / inhale your faint odor, but I believe a few will; / O slender leaves! O blossoms of my blood!" Whitman moves upward from the grass to the sky and the stars, from the small to the vast, from the flicker to the supreme fire burning above there up in the sky as also here below in the heart of the solitary singer. There is no greater ecospiritual poet than Whitman.

NOTES

1. Lawrence Buell, "Walden's Environmental Projects," in *The Environmental Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1995), p. 181.
2. Ibid, p. 115.
3. Ibid, p. 118.
4. Harold Aspiz, "This Compost," in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, eds. J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).
5. Sri Aurobindo, "Recent English Poetry," in *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), p. 165.
6. Peter J. Bellis, "Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics by M. Jimmie Killingsworth," *American Literary Realism*, 39, no. 2 (Winter 2007), p. 182.
7. Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass: Authoritative Texts, Prefaces, Whitman on his Art, Criticism*, eds. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973). [All the citations (poems, prefaces and editorial comments) are from this edition. References to various critical essays have also been cited from this edition.], p. 411.
8. Timothy J. Burberry, "Ecocriticism and Christian Literary Scholarship," *Christianity and Literature*, 61, no. 2 (Winter 2012), p. 201.
9. Walt Whitman, p. 41.
10. Pramod K. Nayar, "Ecocriticism," in *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism* (Delhi: Pearson, 2010), p. 249.
11. "Ecological Balance According to Ancient Scriptures" https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/220350/7/07_chapter_2.pdf, p. 11.
12. Pramod K. Nayar, p. 250.
13. "Status of Ecofeminism: Women-led Environmental Activism in India" (from Shodhganga) https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/207800/5/5_chapter_2.pdf, p. 42.
14. Marlene Longenecker, "Women, Ecology, and the Environment: An Introduction," *NWSA Journal*, 9, no. 3, (Autumn, 1997), p. 2.
15. Walt Whitman, "Three of Us" in *Specimen Days*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: The Library of America, 1982), p. 818.
16. Walt Whitman, "Thoughts under and Oak—A Dream" in *Specimen Days*, p. 816.
17. Jacques de Marquette, *Introduction to Comparative Mysticism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 22.
18. Jiddu Krishnamurthy, "Brockwood Park - 4th Entry - 17th September 1973" <https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/brockwood-park-4th-entry-17th-september-1973>

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Collaboration

JOURNAL OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER



GEMS FROM THE *COLLABORATION* ARCHIVE

Gems: An Introduction

Gems from the *Collaboration* Archive (Gems) is much more than a reprinting of old articles from *Collaboration*. As discussed in the Letter from the Publisher at the front of this issue (p. 8), new collaborative groups have emerged within the Sri Aurobindo Association of America (SAA). A common action with SAA and these groups is our aspiration for collective yoga, a part of which is the attempt to access our deepest intuitions by holding particular questions: How do we *do* collective Yoga? What does it mean to aspire to be a gnostic community? Can we meet soul to soul rather than ego to ego and work together from soul-space? Gems was birthed from these questions into a multiplatform participatory vehicle for collective engagement with Integral Yoga—on the web and around the world.

Now in our 46th year of publication, *Collaboration* has a lot of really special articles in the archive—you can find the first 44 years of issues available via PDF on our website at www.collaboration.org. For the Gems series, the Web Advisory Board decided to collectively choose one article at a time, redesign it in the way that reflects the spaciousness and beauty of the journal's comprehensive redesign, republish it in the current volume as seen in your hands or on your screen, and bring it forward on our website as a packet that is sharable by social media and email. (Please find it on our website and share it with a

thousand friends and a friend.)

When the marketing working group joined forces with the web team, we all decided to host recorded roundtable discussions on each article and upload the content to the Sri Aurobindo Association YouTube Channel (please subscribe and click the notifications button!) With that unfolding, we invited Suma Gowda, a software engineer who has held a longtime interest in exploring spiritual paths by interviewing fellow travelers (www.youtube.com/infinitebeingtv)—to facilitate an online conversation with Debashish Banerji, the author of this inaugural Gems feature.

Additionally, with Gems, if available and willing, we plan to interview the authors of future selected articles and upload the videos to our YouTube channel. Perhaps an author may even be interested in facilitating a recorded roundtable discussing their own article. We shall see. You can find the accompanying digital interview and roundtable of this premiere Gems article on our YouTube channel. And if you are part of a group who wants to join a Gems conversation, or have been digging through the archive and wish to see a past article emerge in this way, email us at editor@collaboration.org. We hope you enjoy, and participate.

- Image: Felicity_Kate11 on Pixabay.

Living Laboratories of the Life Divine

DEBASHISH BANERJI

*This essay was given originally as a talk at the 2003 AUM Integral Yoga conference in Los Angeles.—
Editors*

Today I will speak on the subject “living laboratories of the divine life.” By “living laboratories” I am referring, of course, to Sri Aurobindo’s justly famous phrase taken from *The Life Divine*. But before turning our attention to that phrase, I would like to back up a little in time and consider the idea of the superman as it makes its beginning in the utterance of Friedrich Nietzsche.

In many ways, Nietzsche, as a philosopher, can be said to inaugurate the modern age. Modern philosophy, where it has been fruitful, has been largely an engagement with Nietzsche’s thought. Nietzsche is a controversial figure, a very complex figure. Complex, because he received intuitions from above and uttered them in a new kind of way that challenged the metaphysical tradition. He also introduced ideas—new ideas—that were half-baked. Often, they were not well-formed, and sometimes they were inconsistent. So to denigrate him or to adulate him is, in either case, a dangerous thing.

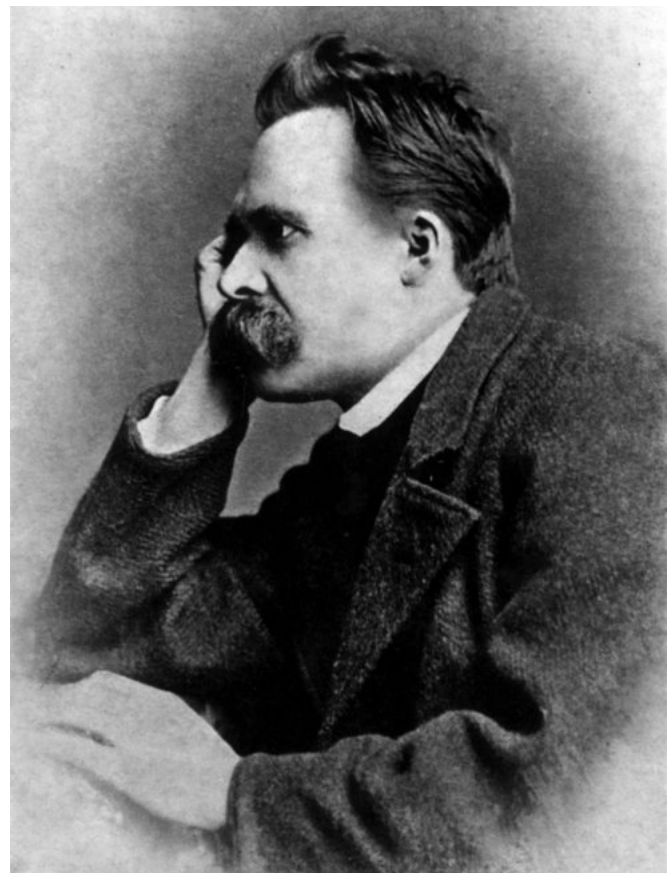
Nietzsche introduced the idea of the superman in his work *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. I will read out a passage from this work. In recent translations of this work, the German term *Übermensch* has been rendered as “overman” instead of “superman.” Some of us are familiar with a similar kind of replacement that has been attempted by Georges Van Vrekhem, who has translated the Mother’s *surhomme* as “overman” rather than “superman.” I do not wish to enter into technical controversies or debates over these terms but bring to your notice that there is a

degree of fluidity about these things that lend themselves to varieties of interpretation.

I read you Walter Kaufmann’s translation of Nietzsche’s passage:

I teach you the Overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All beings so far have created something beyond themselves. And do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is



Friedrich Nietzsche

the ape to man? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the Overman. A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from the worm to man and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape.

Whoever is the wisest among you is also a mere conflict and cross between plant and ghost. But do I bid you to become ghosts or plants?

Behold, I teach you the Overman. The Overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the Overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of other-worldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go ...

Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea to be able to receive a polluted stream without becoming unclean. Behold, I teach you the Overman: he is this sea; in him, your great contempt can go under.

What is the greatest experience you can have? It is the hour of the great contempt. The hour in which your happiness, too, arouses your disgust, and even your reason and your virtue

...

Man is a rope, tied between beast and Overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping.

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under.

I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over.

I love the great despisers because they are the great reverers and arrows of longing for the other shore.

I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may someday become the Overman's ...

I love him who does not hold back one drop of spirit for himself but wants to be entirely the spirit of his virtue: thus he strides over the bridge as spirit.¹

It is a very interesting passage, a profound passage, a passage that I wanted to read out because many who have read Sri Aurobindo have never read Nietzsche, and have acquired certain preconceptions of what the Nietzschean superman is all about. I would encourage them to divest themselves of these ideas. Nietzsche inaugurates the future destiny of the human race in the modern age; at a crisis point in western civilization, he holds out the goal of the self-exceeding of man in the superman. We don't need to assume that Nietzsche himself knew with clarity what he meant by the term "superman," but it is best to receive the complexity of his thought and see its vastness and its greatness. We should look at it side by side with the superman as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and at how their superman relates, if at all, to Nietzsche's idea.

I read first from the Mother a familiar passage. It is from a talk to the children of the Ashram:

There is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung on the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in



this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal, but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Undoubtedly, nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result; she endeavors to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will remain a man in its external form, and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mental and its slavery to ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to man. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious. During the whole of his life upon earth, Sri Aurobindo gave all his time to establish in himself this consciousness he called supramental, and to help those gathered around him to realise it.²

There is much in this that bears resemblance with Nietzsche's description of the superman. Both texts

are explicit about the transitional character of the human species. The Mother's statement actually contains within it Sri Aurobindo's famous assertion, "Man is a transitional being"—and for Nietzsche, "Man is a rope tied between beast and overman," and again, "Man is a bridge and not an end ... " Secondly, both texts emphasize an earthly destiny. And finally, note the not-so-noble appraisal of the human being. Man is no longer the "measure of all things" extolled in the European Renaissance, source of Western civilization's hubris. While the human being in the Mother's formulation may not be the contemptible worm of Nietzsche, it isn't too far from that either. The Mother quickly disabuses humanity of its exalted notion of itself.

I now read Sri Aurobindo's passage from *The Life Divine* where he likens us to "living laboratories":

The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? For if evolution is the progressive manifestation by Nature of that which slept or worked in her, involved, it is also the overt realisation of that which he secretly is.³



While the human being in the Mother's formulation may not be the contemptible worm of Nietzsche, it isn't too far from that either. The Mother quickly disabuses humanity of its exalted notion of itself.

Let us ponder these three texts. In all three, there is the notion of the self-exceeding of man. The human being has to exceed himself, because from the viewpoint of the imperfection of nature, humanity is as faulted as the animal, the worm, is to the human being. It is to set our sights on that kind of goal that Nietzsche is calling us through the voice of Zarathustra. But Nietzsche's call is going out to the will of man. It is not a simple call to the ego—it is not a call to titanism as has been popularly supposed. It is a call to sacrifice, to vastness. It is a call to the formation of the gods within us. The overman, according to Nietzsche, is like the gods of the Greek classical heritage. It is Nietzsche's allergy toward the Christian tradition that makes him deny God. But it is in the becoming of God or of the gods in human guise, that his message lies. But it ends there. What apart from the human will is there to lead us to this goal? If we are hardly more evolved than the worm or the animal in most of our nature, what hope do we have, except for willing something that is faulted into existence in our drive upward?

If we look at Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's texts, we see one critical element that is missed by Nietzsche. They are not talking about the human will attaining to the superman. They are talking about the human being as the site where the superman is formed by agents other than the human. In both cases they use

the term *nature* to indicate this extra-human agency. What is it that they mean by nature? Evidently, if there is something that ties these uses of the word to some common ground, we have to think of nature as the evolutionary force in a conscious form, the evolutionary will.

Sri Aurobindo's texts need to be read in a cross-cultural context. They have contexts that are equally Eastern and Western. Nature, in Sri Aurobindo's usage, carries in its background the entire metaphysical Romantic tradition, the European tradition of nature as a cosmic presence and power. With the metaphysical "death of God" and the birth of the modern age at the turn of the 18th to the 19th century in Europe, German Romanticism found nature as a replacement for God—nature as a power with an intelligence instinct in it, as a cosmic container, a Mother-Force. It is in this sense that the English Romantic poets also extol nature. Sri Aurobindo draws partly on this tradition in his usage.

But for Sri Aurobindo, nature is equally and perhaps even more so all that that term means in the Indian tradition when it is translated as *prakriti*. Sri Aurobindo has written extensively about this term, the various things it means and has meant. The term comes to us from Sankhya⁴ as that *mukhya*, that "chief" of the manifest world that is the primary force

manifesting things. It is that which drives us, drives everything—matter, life, and mind. It gives us the sense of agency through the creation of an ego, *ahamkara*, but actually is the complete authority through the operation of its three *gunas*—*sattwa*, *rajas*, and *tamas*⁵—of all that happens in us.

But *prakriti*, from an even earlier tradition, lost and then revived in the Gita, has two faces to it. It returns to us in another guise through the Tantra in two colors, dark and golden, which occupy two hemispheres and two different modalities, *para* and *apara*. *Apara prakriti* is of the lower hemisphere, of *avidya*, ignorance, wearing the dark guise of unconscious nature, the automatisms of Sankhya. It contains the laws that are coded into matter, life, and mind that run everything, within which we are given the illusion of consciousness. *Para prakriti* is the unveiled force, Nature-Force of the Supreme Divine. It is the calling forth into becoming of Being, of the One Being, the only Being there is.

This dichotomy, this two-fold nature, is contained and encapsulated in that simple word *nature* that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother use in their texts. Because, indeed, the way to the superman, as far as Sri Aurobindo is concerned, is in these two hands of nature, both of these aspects of nature. The lower nature, ignorant, is still instinct with the force of divinity. It has moved matter into the domain of life. It has moved life into the domain of mind. It will move mind into the domain of supermind.

But the question is, when? Nature has eternity in her hands, as the Mother has said. Nature doesn't care for our time schemes. Nature experiments, plays with forms, possibilities, and ideas, and creates this plethora of manifest realities that we find so delightful in this world. We build our botanical gardens and our zoos so that we can travel through these parks and delight in these multitudinous and wonderful creations of nature. Nature has thrown up our human diversity too, our diversity of types, our diversity of thinking, our diversity of cultures. It is all the doing of nature, and she is here to play in infinite more games, because she is the creative spirit. Progress takes place

at her own slow pace through all this.

But the human being, as Aswapathy expresses to the Supreme Mother in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*,⁶ is a hapless unfinished experiment of nature. It is a product of nature's half-finished march toward super-humanity, caught between the worm and the God. From life to life, we suffer the pains and discords of a half-baked consciousness that yearns to exceed itself, that is replete with complex problems it can never solve because of a fundamental incapacity. It feels trapped and imprisoned and cries out for *moksha*, liberation, ultimate escape out of this prison-house of the round of suffering and insoluble complexity, finding no other goal.

This is where Sri Aurobindo intervenes to indicate that nature has another poise—the poise of nature in the knowledge, in the *vidya*. This higher nature is the golden Mahakali behind the black Kali, the body of light, of knowledge, of gnosis, the gnostic Mother. And it is this gnostic Mother, when she descends, who becomes active as the unveiled power controlling the lower nature, who can change everything within the *avidya*, who can change the conditions of the *avidya*. For then, it will be no longer a play of trial and error, a slow and painful growth through eternity of the ascending powers of consciousness, but of the future bringing the present into itself, a precipitation of the goal that begins working within the present, transforming it to its own conditions. This is the one reason why Sri Aurobindo chose to spend all his time and all of his superhuman yogic power to focus on the bringing down of the supermind. He could very easily have sat in his room in Pondicherry and accomplished what he has said some yogis have done in the Himalayas—brought about revolutions in the world. Not only could, he did—a number of them—but he wasn't satisfied with that, because it could not solve mankind's problems.

The problems of humanity cannot be solved by a change of the external conditions, or even a temporary change in the inner consciousness of individuals or peoples that causes them to do exalted things beyond their habitual or normal capacity. For an hour God resides in a nation or in a time. We experience

an hour of God. Human beings are empowered temporarily to do deeds they never could have done; but then, as in the first canto of *Savitri*, “The Symbol Dawn,” inevitably the power recedes, and we are left to “the common light of earthly day.” We are back to business as usual, the sordid poverty of human life.

There is only one way that this can change. It is not through our unaided effort, but through the bringing down of a force, which in spite of us, can change conditions here. But the “in spite of us” has to be understood in its right dimensions. This change of conditions is not an external or a temporary change, it is first and foremost a radical change of consciousness—and this cannot occur without our conscious cooperation. As Sri Aurobindo puts it in the statement I have quoted from *The Life Divine*, as always, with every aspect of the question included, “Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation she wills to work out the superman, the god.”

Let us make no mistakes about the priorities of this process. It is the *para prakriti*, the supreme or higher nature, who is the scientist of this laboratory. It is we who serve her purpose through our adherence. We are the conscious cooperators. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s primary yogic work has been to change the agency of this process from the lower to the higher nature, or rather, to establish the higher within the lower. And what is called the supramental descent and manifestation is exactly the collapse of the division between the *vidya* and the *avidya*. It is the implosion of the knowledge, the power, the *vijnana-shakti* into earth, and that entry has initiated a new age.

A new age does not start by astrological factors. It is not because it is written in the calendar that a new age suddenly begins. A new age is an act of consciousness. It is a powerful act of consciousness, willed by the human cooperators and assented to by the Divine. And this is the new age that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have inaugurated. It is a new age, first and foremost, of world yoga. It is a new age of yoga and of world-yoga—yoga, the accelerated process toward conscious evolution. *Prakriti*, nature, has always been

doing yoga. This is why in *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo can say: “All life is Yoga.” But the yoga of nature is a slow, semi-conscious process. The yoga of human beings who wake up from within by the pointing finger of light that comes as a beacon showing the way is a conscious yoga. It is a conscious yoga that accelerates and quickens the process. It condenses into a lifetime or a few years what would



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otherwise have taken many lifetimes. It brings the future into the present. This is exactly what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done on a cosmic or terrestrial level. They have initiated the earth into a new yoga. The ear of the earth has been privy to the mantra of a new yoga and has accepted it. That yoga has begun.

We heard in a talk yesterday about the conditions of the earth and about the earth as the ashram, the ashram of the world. Ron Jorgensen spoke of the entire world as the home of the Lord, and of the circumstances that come to us in the world as being provided by the Lord for our yoga. Indeed, it is the ashram of the world that all humanity can be said to inhabit today, and in a profounder sense than of providing materials for the growth of consciousness in those who have chosen to take up yoga. It is the ashram of the world because the world itself has been moved into a world-yoga. This is the meaning of the new age.

I would like to draw your attention at this point to an ancient story, a story from the *Puranas*, a story that tells about an occult event that happened in eternal time, an eternal event. It is a story about a great churning of the cosmic ocean so that the pot of *amrita*, the ambrosia of immortality that is at the bottom of the ocean, will be brought to the surface, will be churned up from the bottom. The gods and the demons together undertake this churning. The great world mountain, Mount Meru—which also is in each of us as the *merudanda*, the spine—the world axis, axis mundi, the pillar of the world is used as the churning rod. The great serpent Ananta—who is the base of the evolutionary fountain of avatarhood, of Vishnu—the coiled infinite potential of Time, with Eternity on one side and Perpetuity on the other, eternally changing, never changing, is used as the churning rope. And Vishnu himself, as the tortoise avatar, is the base on which the churning rod, Meru, is stationed.

The first thing that happens with the churning is the rise of the poisons of the ocean. The poisons of the ocean are so dense, so acrid, so corrosive, that even

the demons cannot continue. Both the gods and the demons are completely stalled. The sky turns black with poison. What we today call pollution is as nothing compared to that condition. Man cannot even envisage that condition of poisonous darkness. Neither the gods nor the demons can cope with it. It is at this point that the great Lord Shiva himself comes to the rescue by drinking the poison and holding it, by his yoga-power, in his throat, which is therefore stained blue. This is why Shiva has as one of his names, Nilakanta, the blue-throated.

A number of mystics had experiences around the 5th of December, 1950, at the time when Sri Aurobindo left his body, and several of them saw a vision of the great Shiva drinking the cup of poison. Indeed, the departure of Sri Aurobindo can be understood in this light. The myth of the churning of the ocean is an image of the world yoga initiated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Sri Aurobindo has prepared the process, he has initiated it and he has sacrificed himself so that our unprepared nature may be able to bear the intense difficulties of the beginning. It is the first stage of this world yoga that he has made possible by drinking the acrid poison that rose up from the depths. He has held the supramental light in his body and he has broken the backbone of earthly karma, which would have otherwise made it impossible for us to move into this new age. This is why the Mother has addressed Sri Aurobindo's "material envelope" and said, "Before Thee who has willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee."⁷

All that we see and experience today are the physical repercussions of occult events of this kind. The pollution that we see is inevitable. It is the result of our collective consciousness. It is the poison-fruit of our world karma facing us as we take our first steps in the new age. It is necessary. It will pass. It has already been dealt with by the Lord himself.

But this world yoga, though much quicker than the processes of nature, is still a process of collective preparation that is impersonal and relatively slow,



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because it is a process of bringing consciousness to the unconsciousness. It is awakening it, but awakening it over time, slowly. People receive ideas. In a talk yesterday we heard a whole spate of names of people who appear to be doing the work of the Mother without knowing that they are her instruments. Indeed, they are, and yet the purpose has not yet become conscious in them, the fullness of divine intent has not dawned on them. They are serving the world yoga.

The work of the supramental consciousness occurs not merely at the universal level of the world yoga, but also at the individual level and at several other levels. It is conducting many experiments simultaneously and in an interrelated fashion too complex for the human mind to comprehend. As Sri Aurobindo says in the book *The Mother*, the Mother's steps are very complex, "one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence."⁸ This is why surrender is demanded of us. It is only through surrender that we can progressively become more enlightened instruments of her workings, and in the process find ourselves more and more a part of her. By this means, we are to rise to a consciousness

one with her consciousness, a state from which our present condition will seem indeed very embarrassing. In this progression of the world yoga, we have to be open to the vast, complex, global, and minute working of her supramental *shakti*, that reality which is here among us. The living laboratory is not just the individual, nor is it merely the work to ameliorate world conditions, it is these and a variety of other experiments that are going on at the same time.

When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were in Pondicherry, the Mother has said that there was a question whether they would do the yoga with just a handful of disciples, to intensely try to accelerate the process of the descent of the supermind, bring it down and then radiate it. She said the other option was to go slower, but to gather around them representative specimens of humanity that would be able to bring a much wider possibility of the manifestation of supramental consciousness on earth. She says the decision was not made mentally. The Lord made the decision. It happened by itself—and it is the second course that was followed. This was how the Sri Aurobindo Ashram developed.

We who have been touched by the message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have taken maybe a few faltering steps in the direction of the light that they have shown, the goal they have shown, have inevitably felt at some point how privileged we are, how fortunate we are. What a grace we have received. Let us not be fooled that it is due to any credit of ours that we have been chosen for this grace. It is a process that has selected us.

The phrase “living laboratories” is very relevant here. We are “cultures” both in the sense of particular social expressions and in the sense of biological specimens. We are cultures on petri dishes that are being experimented on. We have been chosen because we are representative of something, something that goes far beyond our own understanding. We are here to serve a purpose that will be revealed to us not today, but only when the work is done.

Today or tomorrow, all the earth, every individual, will receive this blessing, because this is the condition of the world yoga. The world yoga progresses through smaller collectives. Not only as the entire body of the earth, but more quickly, much more consciously, through the intention of people who awake to the reality of what the supramental force is bringing. The growth of the Ashram was around Sri Aurobindo’s

and the Mother’s ascension, it was around their attempt to reach the supermind and bring it down for humanity. For that growth, the roots had to extend far into the possibilities of terrestrial manifestation. Diverse specimens of humanity gathered around Mother and Sri Aurobindo at the Ashram—a tremendous diversity. And yet, each individual had personalities that were molded into their highest possibilities by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—their highest possibilities of manifesting the yoga force.

The Mother did not stop with this process. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had been physically present at the center of the Ashram community as a laboratory of the supramental experiment. But in 1968, she spawned another community with an even wider, more global, planetary basis that would not have them physically at its center. That community would have to open to them internally. Its members would have to be the conscious collaborators in the inner sense, no longer guided externally in the material details of their existence, no longer capable of dragging them down, of pulling at the hem of their robes and soiling them. They also would have to receive the problems of humanity, and they would have to open to the Divine from within and receive the grace of the transformation through collaboration with the *para prakriti*, with the supreme Mother Force.



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This is Auroville. Auroville today is continuing in this work. It also is a sphere of churning, a cradle and crucible of the superman.

And yet, this is not all. In a conversation of December 1938, Sri Aurobindo said that a few hundred people in the Ashram would not be sufficient to make the supramental effective for mankind. Thousands of people doing the yoga sadhana in many walks of life across the world would be needed for that. Individually and collectively, across America, across Europe, across Asia, across the world, we are all invited to be participants in the purpose of the supramental manifestation.

The supermind is interested in us. We are not here merely to make conscious efforts, to make titanic efforts, to fling ourselves from this orbit to the higher orbit. We can be heartened by the fact, but we should also be extremely attentive to the fact, that the supermind is interested in us. It is a Force that is seeking us out. It is an agency, an active power. In seeking us out, it is seeking us not merely as individuals, because its purpose is a divine life on earth. A divine life on earth is not manifested by one person.

A divine life is a context, a divine life is an opening up of a world of phenomena that make for a rich collective existence in all its forms. If we cannot provide it with the conditions for this, its work is to that extent hampered or thwarted of the cooperation that it seeks. We need to be conscious of this, because it is only to the extent that we are conscious of this that we can be its collaborators. We need to gravitate together; unite our wills, form collective individualities. We need to form integral collective flames of aspiration that will be able to invoke that higher consciousness and call down that light, that power to work among us, to form itself in us, to radiate through us in our acts, in our bodies. That is what it seeks.

The power of the supramental *shakti* here on earth seeks unity, integration, and perfection. It seeks these in an integral way. We are first called in consciousness to these experiences of integrality. This is the pressure. Can we be integral within? Can we integrate

ourselves: integrate our mind, life, and body around the psychic being?⁹ Can we feel whole, feel one? This is the pressure. The help is coming for this. But again, it is not merely at the individual level. Can we experience the unity of collective consciousness?

In a previous talk we were fortunate in receiving a message which I have heard for the first time—a very refreshing message—that the signs of the supramental manifestation are not to be sought primarily in the breakdown of the Berlin Wall or the fall of Soviet communism, but within us, in the change in the modality of consciousness. Are we aware of this? Let us become aware of it. We live in God. Are we aware of it? It is the consciousness that has to turn within and see what is being done by the supramental *shakti* inside, not outside. This means an awareness of the process of integration of the being and also its results. We must recognize the fact that unity manifests in and through us when we least expect it. We experience it, but we are not aware of it.

There is a form of experience that the supermind is calling us to have and feel. Individually, great yogis have experienced the Divine, the Oneness, the One Being. And yet, when they have come out of it, they have seen that every individual has remained in the ignorance. Why? Even when they had the experience of oneness, it was only they who had it. When the Mother experienced the descent of the supramental force into the earth at the Ashram playground, it was such a powerful experience she felt that when she opened her eyes she would see everybody flat on the ground. But nobody, except for a handful, even knew what had happened. The ignorance encases us so densely that we are unaware of what is going on within. But the experience, the new spiritual experience to which we are called by the supermind, first in symbolic form, in collectives, and finally as a world phenomenon, is that of collective oneness.

Collective oneness seems at the outset to be a trivial phrase, one of those catchalls of the new age. But it is not that. Collective oneness is arriving at a poise of consciousness above the mind, not individually, but collectively, where a number of people can

experience at once that they are the One Being. They look at each other and they know themselves simultaneously as one and yet irreducibly different—a difference because this One Being is not a finite being, it is infinite. The infinite One wonders at its own infinity. It is one and yet infinite. Its own potentialities come to it from its own infinity, and it wonders. This is the content of the experience of collective oneness that the supermind is calling us toward.

The possibility of being is not the only aspect of the supramental invitation. It is also the possibility of becoming, an integral perfection in becoming. For this we must not merely aspire collectively for the supermind to manifest through us, move us as a collective, but we must offer it an integral field, a field of knowledge, a field of work, a field of love and emotion, a field of physical labor and activity. We offer it an integral field collectively with the consciousness that this is why we are doing this work—not to create an edifice that others will marvel at as some kind of institutional radiation of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—but to allow

the supermind the conditions that it seeks for our cooperation. In the works of knowledge, in education; in the works of will, in business, in politics; in the works of culture, in the emotional life, in the refinement of the senses; in works of the body, of labor, of service, of *dasya*; let us give all our parts of being fully and collectively, because that is what the supramental force is interested in.

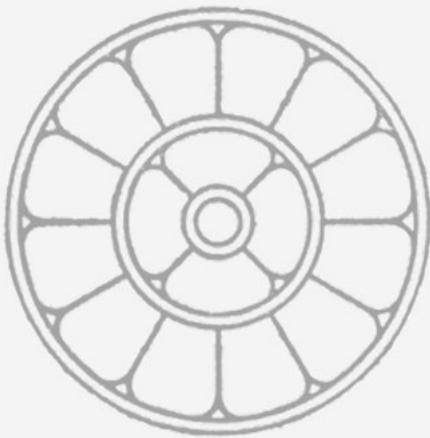
I call upon all of us to meditate on this invitation, because we are called upon to be conscious collaborators, but even more importantly, we are called upon to be living laboratories. We are the living laboratories of the divine life, individually and collectively. To be conscious of this, to hold these possibilities in our being, to be always receptive, this is the call. To have a will for the divine life is good, to surrender the will is better, but to be receptive to the messages of the Scientist who is using us as the site of Her experiment, as a living laboratory, is perhaps the best.

NOTES

1. *The Portable Nietzsche*, Kaufmann, W., Penguin Books (1977), pp.124–127
2. *On Education, Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 12, p. 116
3. *The Life Divine, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 21, p. 6
4. Sankhya is one of the six classical schools of Indian thought concerned with enumerating and categorizing the principles of existence.
5. The *gunas* are modes or qualities of nature; *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are the qualities of equilibrium, action, and inertia.
6. *Savitri*, an epic mantric poem of around 24,000 lines, is Sri Aurobindo's masterwork.
7. Mother had this sentiment inscribed on Sri Aurobindo's *samadhi*, the white marble shrine in which his "material envelope" was placed after his passing.
8. *The Mother with Letters on the Mother, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 32, p. 14.
9. The psychic being is Sri Aurobindo's term for the soul of the individual, the spark of the divine fire that grows behind mind, life, and body and develops in the evolution until it is able to transform the nature from ignorance to knowledge. See *Glossary of Terms in Sri Aurobindo's Writing* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram: 1994), p. 119.

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CULTURE





Savitri on Courage in Dark Places

TRANSLATED BY GLORIA SAYAVEDRA

Porque el Espíritu permite entidades terribles
y existen Poderes sutiles y enormes
que se escudan a sí mismos con la ignorancia que encubre.
Engendros de los abismos, agentes de la Fuerza siniestra,
enemigos de la luz, intolerantes a la paz,
simulan el pensamiento del brillante Amigo y Guía,
contradicen en el corazón a la eterna Voluntad,
velan al oculto Armonizador que inspira.
Sus oráculos de sensatez constituyen nuestras cadenas;
han cerrado con llaves de doctrina las puertas de Dios
y bloqueado por la Ley su inagotable Gracia.
En todas las líneas de la naturaleza, han establecido sus postas
e interceptado las caravanas de Luz;
doquiera los Dioses actúan, ellos intervienen.
Es colocado un yugo sobre el débil corazón del mundo;
ocultos sus latidos de la suprema Dicha,
y los cerrados confines de Mente brillante
bloquean las finas entradas del Fuego celestial.
Siempre los Aventureros oscuros parecen ganar;
la Naturaleza llenan con sociedades del mal,
convierten en derrotas las victorias de la Verdad,
proclaman como falsedades las leyes eternas,
y cargan el dado de la Fortuna con mentiras de hechicero;
han ocupado los santuarios del mundo, usurpado sus tronos.

...

Para una completa transformación integral, en el transcurso de la jornada espiritual el buscador requiere encontrar varios planos de consciencia, desde el más luminoso hasta el más oscuro y menos consciente. En Yoga Integral no es suficiente con simplemente trascender—personal o colectivamente los aspectos sombríos de la consciencia. El buscador debe enfrentar los mundos más bajos y oscuros y llevarles la luz de la consciencia y transformarlos. En esta selección y la subsiguiente traducción al español, Sri Aurobindo da cuenta de los mundos inferiores de falsedad e ignorancia, y la victoria eventual de la verdad y la luz. Es de esperarse como parte integral de la jornada enfrentar tiempos oscuros, ya sea personal o colectivamente, y no debe desanimar al viajero de espíritu.



In the course of the spiritual journey, a seeker must encounter various planes of consciousness, from the most luminous to the darkest and least conscious, for a complete integral transformation. In Integral Yoga it is not sufficient to merely transcend the shadow aspects of consciousness—personally or collectively. The seeker must face the lowest and darkest worlds and bring to them the light of consciousness and transform them. In this selection and accompanying Spanish translation, Sri Aurobindo gives an account of the lower worlds of falsehood and ignorance, and the eventual victory of truth and light. Facing dark times, whether personally or collectively, should not discourage the traveler of spirit and is to be expected as an integral part of the journey.

For terrible agencies the Spirit allows
And there are subtle and enormous Powers
That shield themselves with the covering Ignorance.
Offspring of the gulfs, agents of the shadowy Force,
Haters of light, intolerant of peace,
Aping to the thought the shining Friend and Guide,
Opposing in the heart the eternal Will,
They veil the occult uplifting Harmonist.
His wisdom's oracles are made our bonds;
The doors of God they have locked with keys of creed
And shut out by the Law his tireless Grace.
Along all Nature's lines they have set their posts
And intercept the caravans of Light;
Wherever the Gods act, they intervene.
A yoke is laid upon the world's dim heart;
Masked are its beats from the supernal Bliss,
And the closed peripheries of brilliant Mind
Block the fine entries of celestial Fire.
Always the dark Adventurers seem to win;
Nature they fill with evil's institutes,
Turn into defeats the victories of Truth,
Proclaim as falsehoods the eternal laws,
And load the dice of Doom with wizard lies;
The world's shrines they have occupied, usurped its thrones.

. . .

Viva, respiraba un profundo aliento espiritual,
la Naturaleza removía su rígido código mecánico
y los artículos del coercitivo contrato del alma,
la Falsedad devolvía a la Verdad su torturada
forma.

Anuladas fueron las tablas de la ley del Dolor,
y en su lugar aparecieron luminosos caracteres.
El diestro dedo invisible del Escriba anotó
su caligrafía rápida e intuitiva;
las formas de la tierra en sus divinos documentos
se convirtieron,
la sabiduría encarnó lo que la mente no podía
revelar,
la inconsciencia fue expulsada del silencioso
pecho del mundo;
transfigurados los esquemas fijos del Pensamiento
racional.

Despertaba la consciencia en las cosas inertes,
él impuso sobre el átomo oscuro y la masa muda
la escritura brillante del Imperecedero,
inscribió en el sombrío corazón de las cosas
caídas
el himno de alegría del libre Infinito
y el Nombre, fundamento de la eternidad,
y delineó en las despiertas células exultantes

en los jeroglíficos de lo Inefable
la lírica del amor que espera a través del Tiempo
y el místico volumen del Libro de la
Bienaventuranza

y el mensaje del Fuego superconsciente.
Entonces la vida latió pura en la forma corporal;
el Resplandor infernal pereció y ya no pudo
aniquilar.

El Infierno se cuarteó a través de su vasta fachada
escarpada
como si un edificio mágico fuera deshecho,
la Noche se abrió y desapareció como un abismo
de sueño.

En el hueco excavado del ser como Espacio vacío
en donde ella había ocupado el lugar del Dios
ausente,

allí fluyó una gran Aurora íntima y maravillosa;
sanado fue todo lo que había hecho el corazón
desgarrado del Tiempo


y la melancolía no pudo vivir más en el pecho de
la Naturaleza:

la división cesó, porque Dios estaba allí.

El alma encendió al cuerpo consciente con su
rayo,
materia y espíritu se unieron y fueron uno.

— SRI AUROBINDO, *Savitri*, Libro II. El Libro del Viajero de los Mundos, Canto VIII.

El Mundo de la Falsedad, la Madre del Mal y los Hijos de la Oscuridad.



Alive, breathing a deep spiritual breath,
Nature expunged her stiff mechanical code
And the articles of the bound soul's contract,
Falsehood gave back to Truth her tortured shape.
Annulled were the tables of the law of Pain,
And in their place grew luminous characters.
The skilful Penman's unseen finger wrote
His swift intuitive calligraphy;
Earth's forms were made his divine documents,
The wisdom embodied mind could not reveal,
Inconscience chased from the world's voiceless
 breast;
Transfigured were the fixed schemes of
 reasoning Thought.
Arousing consciousness in things inert,
He imposed upon dark atom and dumb mass
The diamond script of the Imperishable,
Inscribed on the dim heart of fallen things
A paeon-song of the free Infinite
And the Name, foundation of eternity,

And traced on the awake exultant cells
In the ideographs of the Ineffable
The lyric of the love that waits through Time
And the mystic volume of the Book of Bliss
And the message of the superconscient Fire.
Then life beat pure in the corporeal frame;
The infernal Gleam died and could slay no more.
Hell split across its huge abrupt facade
As if a magic building were undone,
Night opened and vanished like a gulf of dream.
Into being's gap scooped out as empty Space
In which she had filled the place of absent God,
There poured a wide intimate and blissful Dawn;
Healed were all things that Time's torn heart had
 made
And sorrow could live no more in Nature's
 breast:
Division ceased to be, for God was there.
The soul lit the conscious body with its ray,
Matter and spirit mingled and were one.

— SRI AUROBINDO, *Savitri*, Book II: The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, Canto VIII:
The World of Falsehood, the Mother of Evil and the Sons of Darkness pp. 225-226, 231-232.

GLORIA SAYAVEDRA joined the Sri Aurobindo Association board of directors and the *Collaboration* design team to help celebrate difference in unity, especially by bringing forward additional expressions of the collective soul. She facilitates a weekly bilingual (English/Spanish) reading group of Sri Aurobindo's magnificent epic, *Savitri*.

The Void

JEFF STURM

Sleeplessness gave way to inner awakening:
Beginning with a vast sense of nothingness

of the void at the origin of existence

It seemed like profound revelation
like something to be known
but beyond understanding.

Certainty of truth prevailed:

The surety that emptiness, mind, and emergence
are blended into unfolding reality.

A vision of ongoing manifestation became visceral
all encompassing, perpetual:

There is nothing
There is endlessly complex diversity
And they are indivisible.

First principles of rhythm and pattern emerged:

The pulsation of all things
rendering into shapes and shadows
the constituents of creativity.

And a new comprehension arose beyond all doubt:

That light and love are
the binding forces of all that arises

and fades away.

JEFF STURM is an East-West psychology Ph.D. student at California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) focused on the written work of Sri Aurobindo under Professor Debashish Banerji. He has also been reading *Synthesis of Yoga* with retired CIIS Professor Eric Weiss for the last several years, until Eric's unfortunate recent passing.



AUROVILLE 80: THE POETRY OF DAILY LIFE

Mandakini (a member of the Integral Yoga global community) wishes to announce the publishing of *Auroville 80: The Poetry of Daily Life*—a book of photos by Nadia Loury, chair of AVI France. Nadia lived in Auroville during the 1980s, when the Auroville community consisted of fewer than 500 members. Her photographs capture the day-to-day life of the people living and working in Auroville and are a visual testimonial to what Mandakini calls the “clumsy, at times zany, but always enthusiastic attempts” toward creating something new on a red plateau in southern India. The Mother was the original inspiration for this effort. Each section of the book is introduced with text in French and English that contextualizes the photographs. The Pavilion de France and many Aurovillians supported this publication. To order, please contact Nadia at nadia.loury@orange.fr. All profits from the book will go to the Acres for Auroville project to help secure Auroville’s missing plots.



THE ONE BOOK

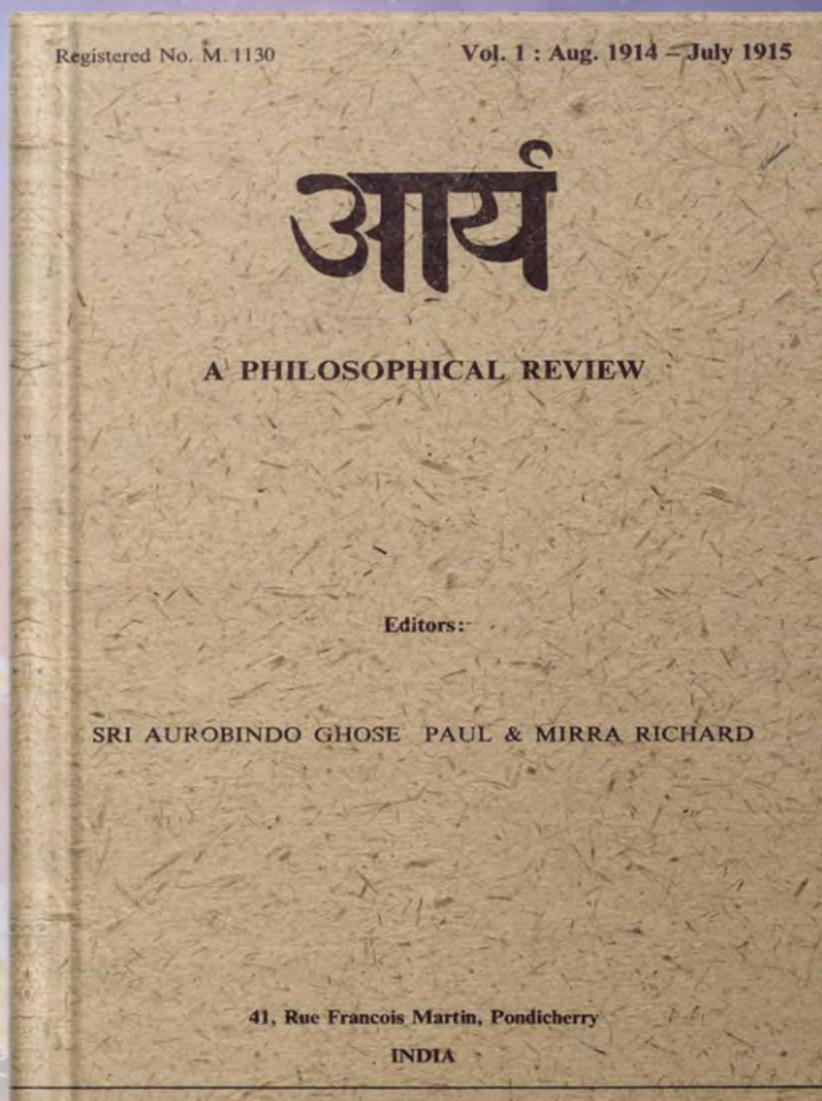
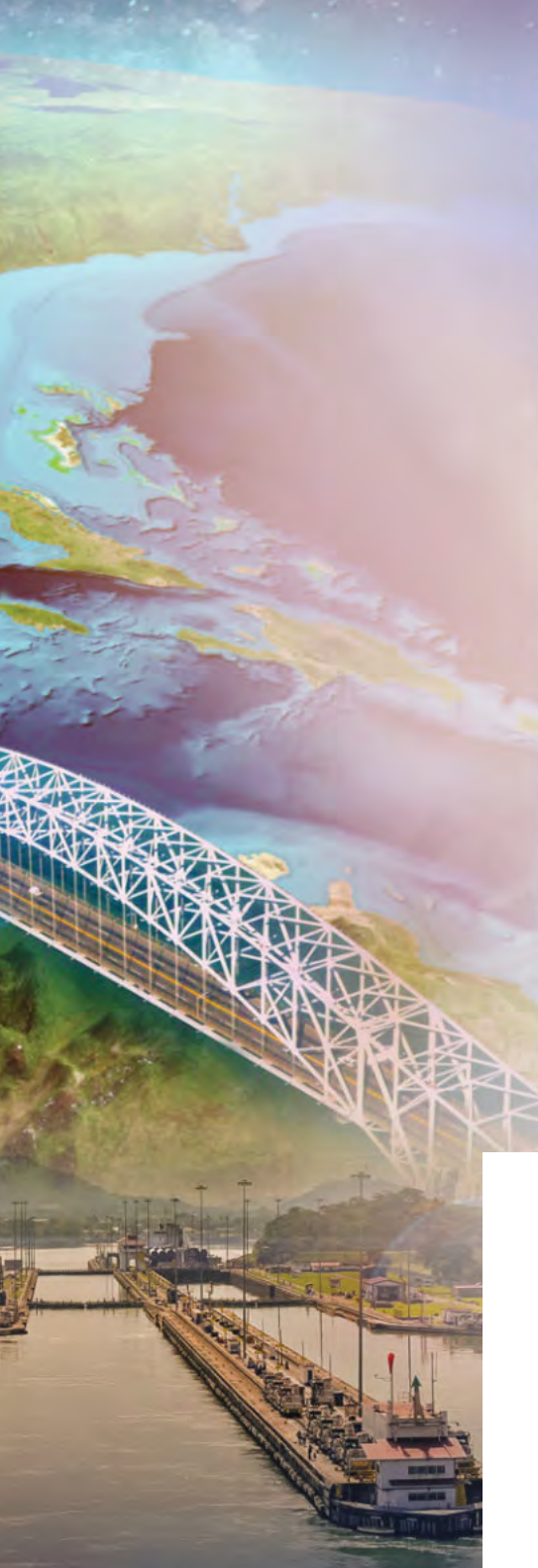
*Compiled and edited by Ronald Jorgensen
and William Leon*

A unique and extraordinary compilation on the theme of oneness, *The ONE Book* is truly a treasure. The compilers and editors, Ron Jorgensen and William Leon, have done a brilliant job in collecting, selecting, and arranging over 1,000 quotations, poems, stories, anecdotes, and meditative reflections on the subject of oneness—the inherent unity that underlies and sustains our very existence. The material gathered together in this single volume derives from every continent on Earth and originates from over 500 authors and 100 nations. Taken from a vast and extensive range of sources, the texts express the understanding and realization of the deep inner and pervasive reality of oneness from a great variety of perspectives, traditions, and cultures. Ancient wisdom and contemporary wisdom are shown to come from many places and walks of life. In some ways, the surprising origins of some of the texts help to confirm the reality of oneness, particularly because it is known, lived, and expressed in such a great variety of ways and by a great variety of people. If you’re looking for inspiration, reason for hope, or even a kindly joke to brighten your day, you can find it here. For more information visit www.theonebook.world.



BRIDGING

Panama, the canal that *divides* the Americas
and *unites* the world



The Panama Canal opened on the 15th of August, 1914. Also, on the 15th of August 1914, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother launched the monthly review *Arya* (Sri Aurobindo's 42nd birthday), publishing serially what would become his major written works and perhaps half of the *shastra*, the systematized action and science, of Integral Yoga.

For many, the Panama Canal is of service to the world, through which commerce, military vessels, cruise ships, sailing vessels flow—all avoiding the long trip around Cape Horn and the Southern Ocean, where the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans collide and gale-force winds and icebergs pose real potential to sink a ship.

In turn, the *Arya* opened an artery from the Divine: exposing intuitive experience to the rational, showing us that the Absolute Godhead is dynamic Truth and not an abstract reality, reigniting our inner knowledge, and proclaiming in its first paragraph that “the earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last,—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.” Both provide for us, unite us, and are part of the bifurcation, breakdowns, and breakthroughs of the Anthropocene.—Mateo Needham



Evolution

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, *Collected Poems*, p. 595

Among SRI AUROBINDO's many poetic compositions are two sonnets titled "Evolution"—the second of which we found especially fitting for the theme of Time-Spirit; particularly for the quiet, yet assured, sense of hopefulness it conveys. • Image: Trace Hudson

Collaboration Journal

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

FALL/WINTER 2021 | VOL. 46 NO. 3

American Ecology

*What is your integral response
to the ecological crisis?*



INAKI DEL OLMO

2020 has seen the Australian continent and the American West torched by fire. It has witnessed protests bubble up en masse across the country, spilling out into a global movement. Within weeks, a pandemic ensnared the entire planet, further straining the interconnected nature of people, animals, and our shared ecological home. We are nature ourselves, after all, and part of this landscape, seething. Whether we choose to challenge “the old ways” inherently designed to exploit and oppress remains to be seen. Earth, as it goes, has gone through many transformations. How do we understand the current transformations taking place, and navigate them from an integral perspective?

In the Fall/Winter 2021 issue of *Collaboration* we will continue to focus on Time-Spirit and how it is moving in nature. What is progressing deeply behind the headlines and distractions on the surface? Can you speak to these issues from intuitive mind and surprise us with new understandings of Earth and ourselves? In what ways might Integral Yoga help us process the loss of our home ecosystems as they smolder away? What is touching you to live more consciously and lovingly, to help heal both traumatized bodies and weaponized lands? Is there earth-based wisdom from our indigenous communities we can raise to help reconcile our separation from each other and our collective environment? We invite you to integrally engage with questions that tap the roots of our American ecology.

MISSION: *Collaboration* is the journal of Integral Yoga published in the United States. Our mission is to share articles, conversations, poetry, and art that deeply engage our transitional times with the beauty, joy, and hope of the vast wisdom and practice of this evolutionary tradition and its founders, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We explore and celebrate particularly the individual practice of yoga in this country as well as currents and expressions of the collective yoga of the American soul in our times.

AUDIENCE: *Collaboration* is a means of reflection, encouragement, and critical thinking for the Integral Yoga community here at home. We also want to highlight friends and allies in related areas of personal and social transformation. Including these fellow travelers requires sensitivity from our contributors, whom we ask to refrain from using references and terms of

Integral Yoga and the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother without explaining or clarifying them.

CONTENT: We welcome many kinds of contributions, including community updates, interviews, reflective and educational and experiential essays, poetry, artwork, stories, humor, and reviews. The theme for Summer 2021 invites your works on the contemporary social and environmental currents of the Time-Spirit from a yogic perspective.

DEADLINE: AUGUST 1, 2021

Please contact our editorial team for the word count suitable for your contribution prior to submission at editor@collaboration.org. This will allow us to provide you with writer's guidelines that reflect our editorial criteria.



THE CALL OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

A godhead moves us to unrealised things.
Asleep in the wide folds of destiny,
A world guarded by Silence' rustling wings
Shelters their fine impossibility:

But parting quiver the caerulean gates;
Strange splendours look into our dreaming eyes;
We bear proud deities and magnificent fates;
Faces and hands come near from Paradise.

What shines above, waits darkling here in us:
Bliss unattained our future's birthright is,
Beauty of our dim souls grows amorous,
We are the heirs of infinite widenesses.

The impossible is our mask of things to be,
Mortal the door to immortality.

—SRI AUROBINDO, *Collected Poems*, p. 595