

SUMMER 2022

VOL. 47 NO. 2

Collaboration

JOURNAL OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

Sri Aurobindo
150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

In matter shall be lit the spirit's glow,
In body and body kindled the sacred birth;
Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,
The days become a happy pilgrim march,
Our will a force of the Eternal's power,
And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.

—SRI AUROBINDO, *Savitri*, *Collected Works of
Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 33, p. 55



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ABOUT THE COVER

Cover image of sunrise in the mountains of Nepal by David Mark (courtesy Pixabay).

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Collaboration

JOURNAL OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA OF SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

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IMAGE: SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, DELHI



EDITORIAL

Sri Aurobindo's 150th Birth Anniversary

THIS SPECIAL EXPANDED ISSUE OF *COLLABORATION* celebrates the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo. Born on August 15, 1872, Sri Aurobindo was a significant personality of the 20th century, known as a leading political and spiritual figure in India and as one of the world's preeminent spiritual visionaries.

Sri Aurobindo's works and teachings gradually became known in India after the publication of his writings in the 1920s and 1930s. In recent decades, he has become widely recognized in India and abroad both as a leading freedom fighter in the Indian cultural renaissance and as a spiritual seer. Due to the vast and far-reaching nature of his vision and realization, one can expect his influence to continue for decades, and even for centuries to come.

In the first years of the 20th century, Sri Aurobindo's work focused on the liberation of India from the colonial rule of Great Britain (this was finally accomplished on August 15, 1947, his 75th birthday). But Sri Aurobindo's overt political work ended abruptly in 1910 due to external circumstances and important spiritual experiences that aligned him with a broader vision for transformation of human consciousness and life on earth.

After moving to Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo conducted an intense and focused spiritual practice from 1910 to 1926 that resulted in numerous yogic powers and realizations. This culminated in the experience of the supermind, a comprehensive truth-consciousness capable of transforming nature at both the individual and the collective levels. Due to the urgency of this work, which would make a decisive difference in the future fate of collective consciousness, for the rest of his life Sri Aurobindo pursued his ultimate goal of bringing down the supermind into

matter and establishing its transformational effects on earth.

Sri Aurobindo was a prolific writer. His works ranged from plays, poetry, history, and cultural and political critiques to philosophy, yoga, and spirituality. The first attempt at publishing his collected works resulted in a 30-volume set, the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL)*, published in 1972. *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA)*, a 37-volume set comprised of the contents of the original 30 volumes as well as around 4,000 pages of new texts, became available in electronic format starting in 1997.

Any attempt to select a representative sample of this large body of work is bound to be inadequate. Therefore, the selections of Sri Aurobindo's writings included in this issue are simply humble offerings to honor Sri Aurobindo and stimulate spiritual aspiration in the reader. "Supermind and the Life Divine" relates the metaphysical framework laid out in his magnum opus, *The Life Divine*, to the supermind, which is the key to the transformation of life and consciousness on earth. "The Miracle of Birth" is a short poem that celebrates the evolution of consciousness from the lowest forms to divinity. "A God's Labour" provides a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo's immense spiritual mission to bring light into darkness and ignorance, while "Invitation" is a call to join him on his quest.

Contributions by other writers include an overview of Sri Aurobindo's life and work by Karun Das, which cites elucidating quotations from several of Sri Aurobindo's works; an essay by Martha Orton titled, "The Role of the Avatar," which discusses avatarhood as described by Sri Aurobindo in *Essays on the Gita*; and an article by Shraddhavan, "Reading *The Life Divine*," which tells how

a study group in Auroville approached this process and includes salient highlights from that book. Lastly, Jan Maslow's contribution, "Walking the Path of Beauty," is an inspiring essay on the practice of sadhana.

The rest of the articles in this issue are solicited from

our readers and other writers for the purpose of sharing how Sri Aurobindo's teachings have impacted their lives. We are grateful to all for these submissions and hope that our readers will enjoy them as much as we have.

—Bahman A.K. Shirazi and Martha Orton, editors



IMAGE: JAMES PAGE

The Miracle of Birth

SRI AUROBINDO

I saw my soul a traveller through Time;
From life to life the cosmic ways it trod,
Obscure in the depths and on the heights sublime,
Evolving from the worm into the god.

A spark of the eternal Fire, it came
To build a house in Matter for the Unborn.
The inconscient sunless Night received the flame,
In the brute seed of things dumb and forlorn

Life stirred and Thought outlined a gleaming shape
Till on the stark inanimate earth could move,
Born to somnambulist Nature in her sleep,
A thinking creature who can hope and love.

Still by slow steps the miracle goes on,
The Immortal's gradual birth mid mire and stone.

—*Collected Poems, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 2, p. 615



HE WHOM WE SAW YESTERDAY IS ON EARTH



IMAGE: SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, DELHI

THE MOTHER

MARCH 30, 1914

IN THE PRESENCE OF THOSE WHO ARE INTEGRALLY THY SERVITORS, THOSE WHO HAVE attained the perfect consciousness of Thy presence, I become aware that I am still far, very far from what I yearn to realise; and I know that the highest I can conceive, the noblest and purest is still dark and ignorant beside what I should conceive. But this perception, far from being depressing, stimulates and strengthens the aspiration, the energy, the will to triumph over all obstacles so as to be at last identified with Thy law and Thy work.

Gradually the horizon becomes distinct, the path grows clear, and we move towards a greater and greater certitude.

It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with joy and gratitude when I think of it, and my hope has no bounds.

My adoration is beyond all words, my reverence is silent.

—*Prayers and Meditations, Collected Works of the Mother*, vol. 1, p. 113



Sri Aurobindo

and the

Evolution beyond Mind

KARUN DAS

A REVOLUTIONARY AND A YOGI

ON MAY 1, 1908, AUROBINDO GHOSE¹ WAS arrested by heavily armed British police on charges of complicity in a bomb plot to assassinate a British judge. He would spend the next 12 months in jail in Alipore (a neighborhood of Kolkata in West Bengal), mostly in solitary confinement. This would turn out to be “the first state trial of any magnitude in India.”² The British were keen to put him away, as he was quite possibly the most powerful force behind the newly awakened Indian nationalist movement.

At first, he had mostly worked behind the scenes, preferring to move those in the public eye towards the desired goal rather than standing out in the front. His writings in various publications were highly incendiary, but skillfully crafted so as not to give the colonial rulers anything to seize on to charge him with sedition. However, as word of his leadership became common knowledge, nationalist organizers increasingly called upon him as a public speaker and organizer. His voice and skillful political tactics also caught the attention of the British colonial administrators, one of whom wrote that Aurobindo was the most dangerous man in India.



IMAGE: SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, DELHI

His early days had seemed far from promising for this revolutionary career. Raised by his father to speak only Hindi and English—not his native Bengali—he was educated in England from ages 7–21, and excelled in the classics. Life in England was tremendously challenging, however. Due to sparse and irregular support payments from his father in India, Aurobindo often went hungry and without adequate clothing or shelter.

Afterwards, on his return to Indian soil, he had the first of many spontaneous spiritual experiences. What he referred to later as “a vast calm” descended on him—a welcome-home gift as it were, from his native land—which left him far removed from the dark moods of his time in England.

Other spontaneous spiritual experiences included one serious incident during his first year back in India, when the horse pulling his carriage threatened to upend it. He experienced a vision of the Godhead surging up from within himself. He later wrote a poem about this near accident, called “The Godhead”:

I sat behind the dance of Danger’s hooves
In the shouting street that seemed a futurist’s
whim,
And suddenly felt, exceeding Nature’s grooves,
In me, enveloping me the body of Him.

Above my head a mighty head was seen,
A face with the calm of immortality
And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
In the vast circle of its sovereignty.

His hair was mingled with the sun and breeze;
The world was in His heart and He was I:
I housed in me the Everlasting’s peace,
The strength of One whose substance cannot
die.

The moment passed and all was as before;
Only that deathless memory I bore.³

A SPIRITUAL TURN

Politics was never a personal pursuit for Aurobindo Ghose. His whole being was consumed by the wish to serve his motherland, and her people, for which he felt a deep love and compassion, and the need to raise her up from her fallen state. Writing of himself in the third person, he later observed, “He always stood for India’s

complete independence which he was the first to advocate publicly without compromise as the only ideal worthy of a self-respecting nation.” And also, “I entered into political action and continued with it ... with one aim and one alone, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it....”⁴

In a letter to his young wife in 1905, he wrote:

I have three madnnesses. Firstly, it is my firm faith that all the virtue, talent, the higher education and knowledge and the wealth God has given me, belong to Him....

The second madness ... is this: by any means, I must have the direct experience of God.... If the Divine is there, then there must be a way of experiencing His existence, of meeting Him; however hard be the path, I have taken a firm resolution to tread it.

The third madness is this: whereas others regard the country as an inert piece of matter and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and the rivers, I know my country as the Mother, I worship her and adore her accordingly. What would a son do when a demon, sitting on his mother’s breast, prepares to drink her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals ... or would he rather run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; not a physical strength ... but with the power of knowledge.... This is not a new feeling in me, not of recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission.⁵

But as Aurobindo progressed towards his political goal of awakening his countrymen to the ideal of freedom and independence, the goal of realizing the Divine within him (one of his “divine madnnesses”) arose. This awakening was spurred when his brother Barin was dying of a high fever. A wandering *sadhu* (ascetic holy man) was passing through and saw Barin. The *sadhu* asked for a glass of water, sliced crosswise through it with a knife while chanting a mantra, and said to give it to the patient. Barin drank it and was cured. This led Aurobindo to decide that if there was a power to be attained by the ancient Hindu spiritual practices, he wanted it to help him in his work to uplift the nation.

From that point onwards, Aurobindo took up ancient yogic practices, all the while continuing unabated with his revolutionary political work. And while he saw no conflict between the two—a stance that marked his entire approach to spirituality—he felt the need to find a guru to give him more direction on the spiritual side. This he found briefly in a yogi named Lele. Lele showed him how to quiet his mind, which he accomplished in a single, one-pointed session over the course of three days. Lele told him that he should surrender himself entirely to the inner guide and move as it moved him. This then became Aurobindo's rule of *sadhana* (spiritual practice) and of life itself. He no longer needed an outer guru or guide.

ALIPORE JAIL—A TURNING POINT

After his arrest in May 1908, Aurobindo spent the next 12 months in mostly solitary confinement in the Alipore jail. At first disheartened, he followed his inner guide and began studying full-time the ancient Hindu sacred texts, the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, and applying their teachings to his circumstances. The results were far more powerful than he had expected. In a speech given after his release, he revealed:

I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me.... It was Narayana⁶ who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies....

He continued:

When the case opened in the lower court and we were brought before the Magistrate I was followed by the same insight. He said to me, "When you were cast into jail, did not your heart fail and did you not cry out to me, where is Thy protection? Look now at the Magistrate, look now at the Prosecuting Counsel." I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was

Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and ... it was Sri Krishna who sat there, it was my Lover and Friend who sat there and smiled. "Now do you fear?" He said, "I am in all men and I overrule their actions and their words."⁷

With these words, Aurobindo reveals the series of experiences that brought him into a living relationship with the divine lover and guide, in the form of Sri Krishna. It was in this way that his faith and trust in his inner guidance became unshakable, by being shown that all—from the British magistrate to the lowliest prisoners—were expressions of the One Divine.

And indeed, precisely 12 months after his arrest, Aurobindo Ghose was cleared of all charges. His defense attorney's closing statement stands as a prophetic utterance:

[L]ong after this controversy is hushed in silence ... long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this Court, but before the bar of the High Court of History.⁸

Less than a year after speaking of his remarkable experiences in jail, Aurobindo received information that he was in imminent danger of a second arrest, and—after consulting his inner guidance—within ten minutes had left everything behind for a winding, clandestine journey that ended in Pondicherry, a French colony in southern India.

PONDICHERRY—YOGA

On April 4, 1910, Sri Aurobindo arrived in Pondicherry (now Puducherry), where he would stay for the remaining 40 years of his life. At first he remained in seclusion as guest of loyal supporters, safe from British agents who wanted him returned to British India. Previously he had been too intent on his political work to give his full attention to the spiritual path that had been laid out before him in Alipore. Now, in enforced isolation, he saw that his divine guide had left him no choice but to pursue with undivided effort the greater mission.

That mission was not exclusively focused on outer work, such as his writing, which took a major leap forward here. No, the vision that was given Sri Aurobindo first in

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny...

the Alipore jail and vastly expanded once he settled in Pondicherry was also that of an inner conquest. He saw that by following a path of ascension of consciousness to higher and higher levels, he would eventually attain a new principle beyond mind, a divine or unity-consciousness he called the supermind.

In the passages below, Sri Aurobindo gives a summary of the course of evolutionary development that humanity teeters on the brink of today, but also hints at the course of spiritual development that he himself had been undergoing at this time:

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way.... Man⁹ has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites.¹⁰

A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accommodation of egos and interests grouped or dovetailed into each other to form a society.... It is such a change and such a reshaping of life for which humanity is blindly beginning to seek, now more and more with a sense that its very existence depends upon finding the way.¹¹

A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself.... It is only the full emergence of the soul, the full descent of the native light and power of the Spirit and the consequent replacement or transformation and uplifting of our insufficient mental and vital nature by a spiritual and supramental

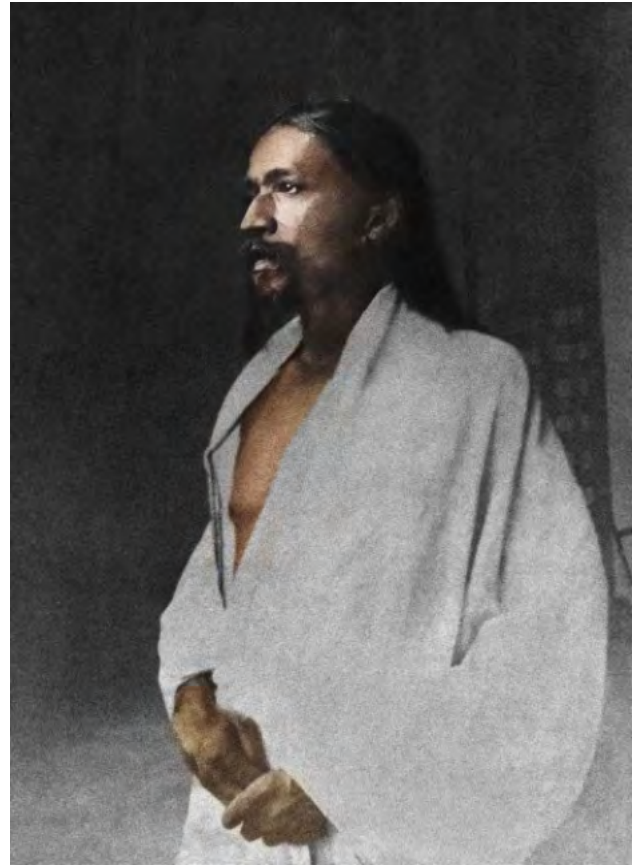


IMAGE: SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, DELHI

supernature that can effect this evolutionary miracle.¹²

His attention no longer concentrated on the political arena, Sri Aurobindo's writing, which had previously been largely in service to his political goals, now became the vehicle for the expression of the rapidly growing inner spiritual consciousness that was forming in him:

In the deep there is a greater deep, in the heights a greater height. Sooner shall man arrive at the borders of infinity than at the fullness of his own being. For that being is infinity, is God—

I aspire to infinite force, infinite knowledge, infinite bliss. Can I attain it? Yes, but the nature of infinity is that it has no end. Say not therefore that I attain it. I become it. Only so can man attain God by becoming God.

But before attaining he can enter into relations with him. To enter into relations with God is Yoga, the highest rapture & the noblest utility. There are relations within the compass of the humanity we have developed. These are called prayer, worship, adoration, sacrifice, thought, faith, science, philosophy....

We may not know him as God, we may know him as Nature, our Higher Self, Infinity, some ineffable goal.... He is accessible even to the Atheist. To the materialist He disguises Himself in matter. For the Nihilist he waits ambushed in the bosom of Annihilation.¹³

But Sri Aurobindo's inner work of personal transformation was not for himself alone. As with his political work, his mission was to raise up humanity, as can be seen in this revelatory passage:

Man's greatness is not in what he is but in what he makes possible. His glory is that he is the closed place and secret workshop of a living labour in which supermanhood is made ready by a divine Craftsman.

But he is admitted to a yet greater greatness and it is this that, unlike the lower creation, he is allowed to be partly the conscious artisan of his divine change. His free assent, his consecrated will and participation are needed that into his body may descend the glory that will replace him. His aspiration is earth's call to the supramental Creator.

If earth calls and the Supreme answers, the hour can be even now for that immense and glorious transformation.¹⁴

And with these lines, we hear the alluring call of that divine flute, beckoning us, the readers, to participate in this "glorious transformation." And we see too the first hints of that vaster work, the Integral Yoga, which was soon to become manifest in an outpouring of new, groundbreaking writings on a tremendous variety of

subjects from yoga philosophy and practice to the evolution of human societies, a complete reinterpretation of the ancient Hindu sacred texts, the promise of a future poetry, and more. But before all of this could be realized, we see the unexpected arrival of a new personage, one who was to become Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator, the Mother.

MIRRA—THE MOTHER

In 1914, a Frenchwoman, Mirra Richard, arrived in Pondicherry to meet Sri Aurobindo. She recognized in him the teacher who had appeared to her inner vision many times during her early life in Paris. And he recognized in her the human embodiment of the Divine Mother, the aspect of the Divine which, he saw, would be essential for the spiritual transformation he envisioned for humanity. Indeed she had by then realized in herself the identification with the Divine Mother, and was already far advanced along the spiritual path—a woman whose inner development and vision of the future of humanity matched his almost precisely.

Shortly after her arrival, she assisted Sri Aurobindo in the publication of a monthly journal he called the *Arya*.

THE ARYA / MAJOR WORKS

First published on August 15, 1914, the *Arya* became the vehicle for Sri Aurobindo's major works, including *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and *Essays on The Gita*, each consisting of between 300 and 900 pages. Remarkably, these were each published one chapter at a time, concurrently. The material for each of these works of profound depth and variety simply descended from above, and he basically transcribed this Niagara of inspiration directly onto the page. Month after month, year after year, this continued for nearly seven years. These works, unmatched in modern literature, covered vast stretches of human endeavor.

For example, *The Life Divine* presents a philosophical treatment of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual vision while, at the same time, responding point by point to every conceivable earlier school of philosophy. "All life is yoga" is the

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, promises to be its last—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.

watchword for *The Life Divine*, meaning that, whether consciously or unconsciously, all of life is an evolutionary journey whose aim and end is divine consciousness:

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation,—for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment,—is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality.... The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last,—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.¹⁵

The Synthesis of Yoga explores in profound detail three primary ancient yogic paths—the yoga of works, the yoga of knowledge, and the yoga of love and devotion.

For Sri Aurobindo, “Yoga is nothing but practical psychology,”¹⁶ raised to its ultimate potential. “[I]t is always through something in the lower that we must rise into the higher existence, and the schools of Yoga each select their own point of departure or their own gate of escape. They specialise certain activities of the lower Prakriti [Nature] and turn them towards the Divine.”¹⁷ For each one of these three paths, he shows how the practitioner grows and develops and finally reaches the pinnacle of attainment for that path.

However, “if our aim be a transformation of our integral being into the terms of God-existence, it is then that a synthesis becomes necessary.”¹⁸

The method we have to pursue, then, is to put our whole conscious being into relation and contact with the Divine and to call Him in to transform our entire being into His, so that in a sense God Himself, the real Person in us, becomes the Sadhaka [the practitioner] of the Sadhana [spiritual practice] as well as the Master of the Yoga by whom the lower personality is used as the centre of a divine transfiguration and the instrument of its own perfection.¹⁹

Years later, when they were published in book form, three of the shorter, related works in the *Arya*—*The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and *War and Self-Determination*—were combined into a single volume on social and political philosophy. In each of these works, Sri Aurobindo takes all of human society and history into his vast world-view, and recasts our limited outlook into an evolutionary and spiritual frame.

In *The Human Cycle*, he explores the evolution of human society from a psychological perspective and traces its growth through five distinct (though often overlapping) psychological phases or ages. One hundred years ago, Sri Aurobindo suggested we may be seeing “the morning twilight of a new period of the human cycle,”²⁰ the fifth of these cyclical ages, one he called the subjective age. This age, once fully realized, then becomes a potential staging era from which can arise an unprecedented spiritual age in which not only individuals but society itself can become spiritualized:

The ascent of humankind into heaven is not the key, but rather the ascent into spirit and the descent also of spirit into normal humanity and the transformation of this earthly nature. For that and not some post-mortem salvation is the real new birth for which humanity waits as the crowning movement of its long obscure and painful course.

Therefore the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those



IMAGE: LYNDIA LESTER

The individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being.

who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being. Even as the animal man has been largely converted into a mentalised and at the top a highly mentalised humanity, so too now or in the future an evolution or conversion ... of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity is the need of the race and surely the intention of Nature; that evolution or conversion will be their ideal and endeavour.²¹

The thing to be done is as large as human life, and therefore the individuals who lead the way will take all human life for their province.... [T]hey will hold that all can be made the spirit's means of self-finding and all can be converted into its instruments of divine living.... This endeavour will be a supreme and difficult labour for the individual, but much more for the race.²²

But once the foundation has been secured, the rest develops by a progressive self-unfolding and the soul is sure of its way.... [T]he earthly evolution will have taken its great impetus upward and accomplished the revealing step in a divine progression of which the birth of thinking and aspiring man from the animal nature was only an obscure and a far off promise.²³

In *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sri Aurobindo studies the trend of humankind towards a closer unification through a review of efforts in the ancient world, as well as more recent attempts by some modern nations, including the ill-fated League of Nations. While a political unity can be constructed through administrative means, the unity of the human race can only be made real if the highest shared ideal of humanity spiritualizes itself and becomes the inner law of life.

In *War and Self-Determination*, he looks at the problems arising out of the First World War, the obstacles to the

elimination of war and violent revolution, and the principle of self-determination for individuals and nations.

THE ASHRAM

After ten months in Pondicherry, Mirra was forced to leave India due to the outbreak of WWI. It was only five years later, in 1920, that she was able to return to continue her work with Sri Aurobindo. Over the next few years, Sri Aurobindo began referring to Mirra as “the Mother,” indicating to the increasing number of disciples now gathering around them that he was acknowledging her as a full embodiment of the Divine Mother that he referenced in his writings.

Then in November 1926, Sri Aurobindo experienced the full descent of the overmind consciousness, the highest state of consciousness hitherto available to this outer world of forms, into his physical body. As a result of this experience, he withdrew from outer activity to focus exclusively on the inner work of bringing down a new, even higher divine consciousness that he named the “supramental consciousness,” which alone could bring about the transformation of humanity. Pursuing this goal, however, also necessitated doing the profoundly difficult work of clearing the inner obstacles that have kept humanity enmeshed in the ego-consciousness. And by doing the work within his own being, he was concurrently working for all of humanity. This was possible, and even inevitable, due to the fact—increasingly proven in recent times by the discoveries of quantum physics—that all matter is connected, is one in its essence. So when one body is purified and transformed, it affects all of humanity, indeed all the earth.

As a result of Sri Aurobindo's withdrawal from outer contacts, the Mother took over the responsibility for the increasing numbers of disciples, and the multitude of outer necessities—as well as giving spiritual guidance and support for their daily needs and spiritual growth. This transition marked the formal creation of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.



THE MASTER POET

One of the foremost aspects of Sri Aurobindo's formidable literary output was his poetic genius. Starting while just a student, his poetry grew in depth and quality as his consciousness deepened and widened. Much of his later poetry was taken up with expressing the inexpressible, the magnificent spiritual experiences and realizations that crowded in upon him. With titles such as, "The Kingdom Within," "The Witness Spirit," "Liberation," and "The Cosmic Consciousness," the heavens were not too high for his poetic revelations. But we can only hint at the vastness of his output by mentioning that his *Collected Poems* runs to over 600 pages! As with the *Arya*, all of his poetry after the session with Lele was written from a silent mind, descending from higher ranges of spiritual consciousness.

And that is only the beginning. Sri Aurobindo's book *The Future Poetry* surveys the history and evolution of poetry through the ages with a main focus on poetry in English, then reveals the ideal spirit and form of a future poetry that will give voice to the deepest soul of humanity and the universal spirit in things. His efforts include many

poems experimenting in new meters. An essay of this scope cannot hope to do more than dip a toe into that vast empire of the soul expressed through his poetic genius, so we will needs be satisfied with a few brief examples.

One of his breathtaking earlier efforts emerged, rather incredibly, from his time in solitary confinement in Alipore Jail:

INVITATION

With wind and the weather beating round me
Up to the hill and the moorland I go.
Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?
Wade through the brook and tramp through the
snow?

Not in the petty circle of cities
Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell;
Over me God is blue in the welkin,
Against me the wind and the storm rebel.

I sport with solitude here in my regions,
Of misadventure have made me a friend.
Who would live largely? Who would live freely?
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

I am the lord of tempest and mountain,
I am the Spirit of freedom and pride.
Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side.²⁴

His poems range from the sublime to the absurd. Of the former, just one of his many sonnets will have to do:

SURRENDER

O Thou of whom I am the instrument,
O secret Spirit and Nature housed in me,
Let all my mortal being now be blent
In Thy still glory of divinity.

I have given my mind to be dug Thy channel mind,
I have offered up my will to be Thy will:
Let nothing of myself be left behind
In our union mystic and unutterable.

My heart shall throb with the world-beats of Thy
love,
My body become Thy engine for earth-use;

In my nerves and veins Thy rapture's streams shall
move;
My thoughts shall be hounds of Light for Thy
power to loose.

Keep only my soul to adore eternally
And meet Thee in each form and soul of Thee.²⁵

As an example of his incisive humor in the service of social commentary, here is a selection of lines from a 1939 poem about the absurdities of materialist science:

A DREAM OF SURREAL SCIENCE

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink
At the Mermaid, capture immortality;
A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink
Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.
[...]
A brain by a disordered stomach driven
Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled
and fell,
From St Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven.
Thus wagged on the surreal world, until

A scientist played with atoms and blew out
The universe before God had time to shout.²⁶

SAVITRI—A LEGEND AND A SYMBOL

But no discussion of Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius has even begun without a presentation of his life's masterwork, *Savitri*.

"The tale of Satyavan and Savitri," Sri Aurobindo once wrote, "is recited in the Mahabharata [an ancient Hindu sacred text] as a story of conjugal love conquering death."²⁷ Sri Aurobindo has transformed this ancient legend into an epic poem of some 24,000 lines of magnificent blank verse, in which the human soul, represented by Satyavan, is delivered from the grip of death and ignorance through the love and power of the Divine Mother, incarnated upon earth as Savitri.

But it is not simply a poem as we usually understand the term. Sri Aurobindo once explained, "I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote it from that level.... In fact *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written

The Mother considered *Savitri* to be the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision, "that marvellous prophetic poem which will be humanity's guide towards its future realisation."

from one's own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative."²⁸

The Mother considered *Savitri* to be "the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision"²⁹ and called it "that marvellous prophetic poem which will be humanity's guide towards its future realisation."³⁰

So how to convey the magic and mastery of this "mantric poetry," that is, poetry whose words, images, and rhythms call forth or elicit the very aspect of consciousness that is being described? In which Sri Aurobindo's consciousness itself is embedded and available to one who reads it in a quiet and receptive attitude? All one can do is to present a few lines for you, dear reader, to see for yourself. First find a quiet space, with no distractions and no time pressure. Then read slowly, either aloud or to yourself, as though bathing in a pool of healing waters.

Let us begin with the protagonist's discovery of the world soul:

As if a beckoning finger of secrecy
Outstretched into a crystal mood of air,
Pointing at him from some near hidden depth,
As if a message from the world's deep soul,
An intimation of a lurking joy
That flowed out from a cup of brooding bliss,
There shimmered stealing out into the Mind
A mute and quivering ecstasy of light,
A passion and delicacy of roseate fire.
As one drawn to his lost spiritual home
Feels now the closeness of a waiting love,
Into a passage dim and tremulous
That clasped him in from day and night's pursuit,
He travelled led by a mysterious sound.
A murmur multitudinous and lone,
All sounds it was in turn, yet still the same.
A hidden call to unforeseen delight

In the summoning voice of one long-known, well-loved,
 But nameless to the unremembering mind,
 It led to rapture back the truant heart.
 The immortal cry ravished the captive ear.
 Then, lowering its imperious mystery,
 It sank to a whisper circling round the soul.
 It seemed the yearning of a lonely flute
 That roamed along the shores of memory
 And filled the eyes with tears of longing joy.
 A cricket's rash and fiery single note,
 It marked with shrill melody night's moonless hush
 And beat upon a nerve of mystic sleep
 Its high insistent magical reveille.
 A jingling silver laugh of anklet bells
 Travelled the roads of a solitary heart;
 Its dance solaced an eternal loneliness:
 An old forgotten sweetness sobbing came.
 Or from a far harmonious distance heard
 The tinkling pace of a long caravan
 It seemed at times, or a vast forest's hymn,

The solemn reminder of a temple gong,
 A bee-croon honey-drunk in summer isles
 Ardent with ecstasy in a slumbrous noon,
 Or the far anthem of a pilgrim sea.³¹

And then this selection, introducing the woman, Savitri herself:

All in her pointed to a nobler kind.
 Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
 Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
 Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
 Overflowed the ways of Thought to unborn things....
 As in a mystic and dynamic dance
 A priestess of immaculate ecstasies
 Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault
 Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,
 A heart of silence in the hands of joy
 Inhabited with rich creative beats
 A body like a parable of dawn
 That seemed a niche for veiled divinity

IMAGE: SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, DELHI



The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

Or golden temple-door to things beyond.
Immortal rhythms swayed in her time-born steps;
Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives.³²

But Sri Aurobindo is not averse to using the discoveries
of science to include among his mystic musings:

She only saw a thin atomic Vast,
The rare-point sparse substratum universe
On which floats a solid world's phenomenal face.
Alone a process of events was there
And Nature's plastic and protean change
And, strong by death to slay or to create,
The riven invisible atom's omnipotent force.³³

To conclude our all-too-brief treatment of *Savitri*, we
offer this deeply prophetic yet promising passage that
speaks to the historical moment we are presently living
through:

A giant dance of Shiva tore the past;
There was a thunder as of worlds that fall;
Earth was o'errun with fire and the roar of Death
Clamouring to slay a world his hunger had made;
There was a clangour of Destruction's wings:
The Titan's battle-cry was in my ears,
Alarm and rumour shook the armoured Night.
I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
Forerunners of a divine multitude,
Out of the paths of the morning star they came
Into the little room of mortal life.
I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,
The massive barrier-breakers of the world
And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
The messengers of the Incommunicable,
The architects of immortality.

Into the fallen human sphere they came,
Faces that wore the Immortal's glory still,
Voices that communed still with the thoughts of
God,
Bodies made beautiful by the spirit's light,
Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,
Approaching eyes of a diviner man,
[...]
Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
And justify the light on Nature's face.³⁴

THE MOTHER—THE SUPRAMENTAL MANIFESTATION

Sri Aurobindo left his largely divinized body on
December 5, 1950. Until that time, he had remained in
seclusion—other than appearing briefly with the Mother
four days each year on “darshan days,” when disciples
and visitors could file past them to receive their blessings.
All those years, the Mother was overseeing the multitude
of details of the Ashram, as well as having direct contact
with disciples and visitors.

After Sri Aurobindo's passing, she was left to do all
that, as well as to carry on with their inner work of
transformation and create a pathway for the supramental
consciousness to descend directly to the earth, to begin
the ultimate transformation of life and matter itself. As
each of them had observed, while they were two, “for
the purposes of the manifestation,” their consciousness
was one and the same.

And on February 29, 1956, the Mother was able to
declare that during the common meditation at the Ashram
that night, this descent of the supramental was exactly
what happened:

This evening the Divine Presence, concrete
and material, was there present amongst you. I
had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe,
and I was facing a huge and massive golden door
which separated the world from the Divine.

As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in
a single movement of consciousness, that ‘THE TIME
HAS COME’, and lifting with both hands a mighty

golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces.

Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.³⁵

Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute:

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.³⁶

The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

It is at work here, and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognize it.³⁷

IN CONCLUSION

We stand at the brink of profound change, with the yawning gap of human ignorance threatening to draw us into its ancient darkness, while at the same time, the pioneers of the New are among us—indeed, they are us! In this pivotal moment, “As on some verge between Time and Timelessness / When being must end or life rebuild its base,”³⁸ we are all called to reach to our highest possibility. The sun-eyed children of a marvelous dawn are all around us, if we but open our eyes to see, and dare to hope and dream. Only so can we invite that radiant new possibility to come and fill our minds and hearts, move our acts, change life’s circumstances. In the deepest darkness, there is always a way through, “when God is guide.”³⁹

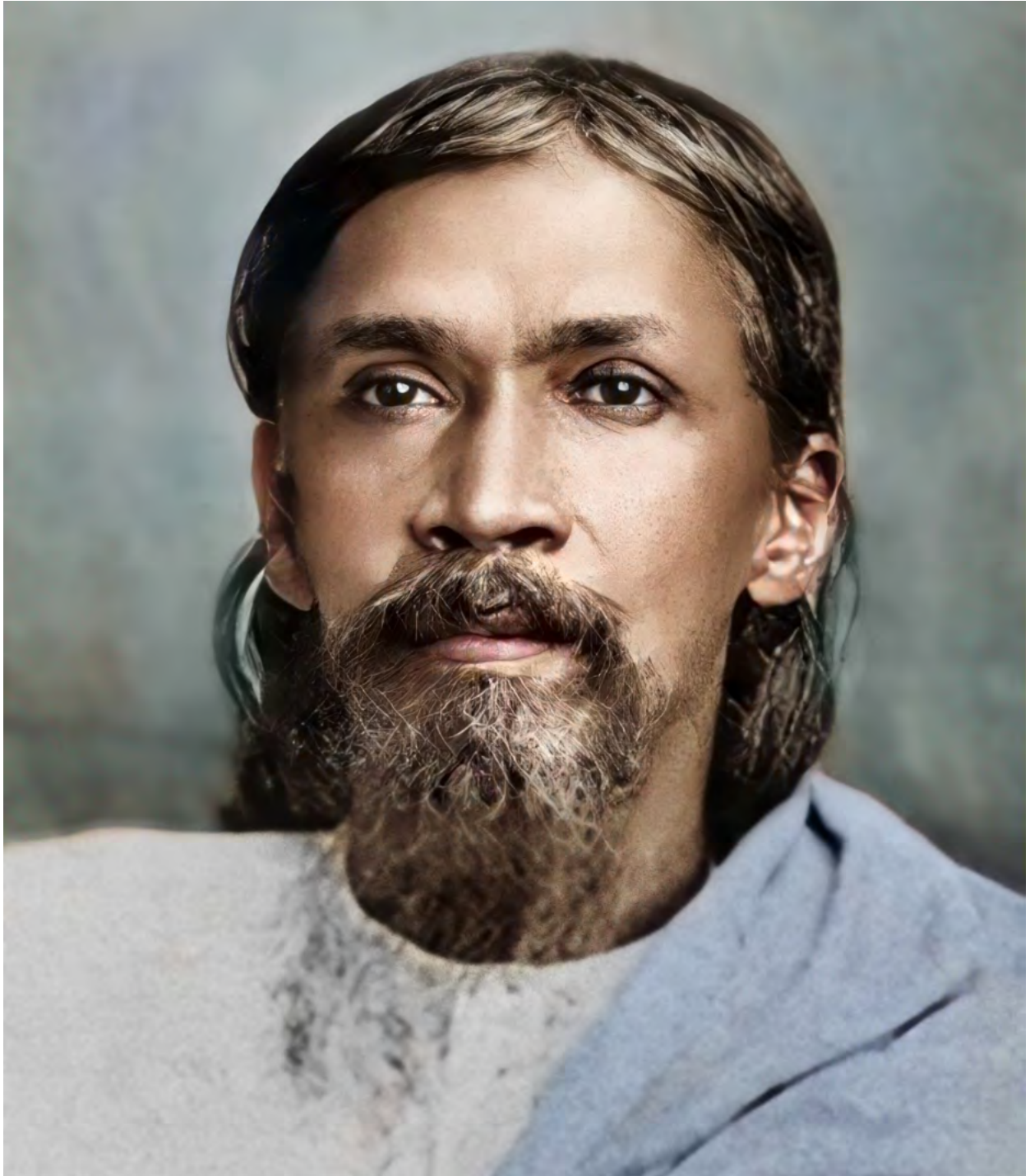
NOTES

1. Sri Aurobindo did not use the title “Sri” before his name until well into his years in Pondicherry. Therefore it seems more historically accurate to refer to him as “Aurobindo” or “Aurobindo Ghose” in his life previous to this, as this is how he referred to himself at the time.
2. Peter Heehs, *Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 57.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), vol. 2, p. 607.
4. Georges Van Vrekhem, *The Mother: The Story of Her Life* (New Delhi, Harper Collins Publishers India, 2000), p.105.

5. Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo's Letters to His Wife Mrinalini Devi*, available in PDF format from Auro e-Books, <https://auro-ebooks-in.s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/book-uploads/Sri-Aurobindo-Letters-to-Mrinalini-Devi.pdf>.
6. Vasudeva and Narayana are both names for the Beloved, the Divine Being, Krishna.
7. Sri Aurobindo, *Karmayogin*, CWSA, vol. 8, pp. 3–12.
8. Heehs, *Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography*, p.60.
9. In direct quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, we retain the classical stylistic usage of “man” to signify humanity as a whole, with pronouns he/him/his. In this context, it must be also noted that within patriarchal Indian society, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were pioneers for gender equality in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
10. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, vol. 22, p. 1090.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 1092.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 1096.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, vol. 12, p. 5.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
15. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, vol. 21, pp. 3–4.
16. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, vol. 23, p. 44.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, vol. 25, p. 23.
21. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, vol. 25, p. 265.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 266–267.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 268–269.
24. Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems*, CWSA, vol. 2, p. 201.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 611.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 614.
27. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, vol. 33, “Author’s Note,” p. xvii.
28. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Poetry And Art*, CWSA, vol. 27, p. 272.
29. The Mother, *Words of the Mother I, Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM), vol. 13, p. 24.
30. The Mother, *Some Answers from the Mother*, CWM, vol. 16, p. 292.
31. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, vol. 33, pp. 289–290.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 343–344.
35. The Mother, *Mother's Agenda*, vol. 1 (first published in France under the title, *L'Agenda de Mère 1951–1960*. English translation copyright 1979 by Institut de Recherches Evolutives Paris), p. 69.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
38. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, vol. 34, p. 461.
39. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, vol. 33, p. 339.

KARUN DAS (Will) Moss discovered Sri Aurobindo in 1970, and has been practicing Integral Yoga ever since.

IMAGE: SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, DELHI





An Unexpected Darshan

LYNDA LESTER

Darshan: *[T]he self-revelation of the Deity to the devotee ... it is an unveiling of his presence, temporary or permanent, and may come as a vision or may come as a close feeling of his presence which is more intimate than sight and a frequent or constant communication with him; that happens by deepening of the being into its inner self and growth of consciousness or by growth of the intensity of bhakti [devotion]. When the crust of the external consciousness is sufficiently broken by the pressure of increasing and engrossing bhakti, the contact comes. —Sri Aurobindo¹*

Author's note: In November 1998 I traveled to Lodi, California, to visit Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP), a residential ashram for the practice of Integral Yoga. On the second night I had the following experience, as recorded in my journal.

NOVEMBER 24, 1998

BY 2:00 A.M., I HADN'T YET FALLEN ASLEEP, AND an hour later I was still wide awake—too much vivifying energy, too much renewal. So at three in the morning I got up and crept downstairs in my flannel nightgown, turtleneck, long johns, socks, and down vest, to sit before the altar.

It was Siddhi Day, the anniversary of the 1926 descent of the overmental consciousness² into Sri Aurobindo's physical body. To mark the occasion, a glass case had been taken off a carved teak box that contained his relics—a box that was now unshielded and radioactive.

I sat a foot away and noticed a powerful flare of energy streaming out. It was physical, tangible, almost like the heat of a fire—but this wasn't heat, it was a thick density of luminous force.

Then I felt Sri Aurobindo.

He was there.

And he was Divine.

All thought stopped. My mind became perfectly still, just as it had in front of the *samadhi* in Pondicherry.³

Suddenly I understood why people cluster around an enlightened being, why they throw themselves to the floor in *pranam*,⁴ and why they want to be nowhere else.

Good gracious, what would it have been like to have been in front of him in person? No wonder there are thousands of accounts recognizing him as master, avatar, Lord.

I had never experienced such a darshan. It was a palpable physical pressure of divine presence, enveloping and overwhelming, a manifestation of God through the human person. Sri Aurobindo was there, and he was beautiful. Oh, he was beautiful—numinous and full of light, beaming light, beaming force, resonant with a love that was velvety and deep and radiant and warm, beneficent and magnificent, far exceeding human magnitude—but the vibration was interfaced with the awareness of my inmost soul, the psychic being; the psychic understands.

All that was left in me was humility, gratitude, and worship.

It lasted a long time.

My eyes were open; I was not in a cosmic state of deep meditation. I was sitting there in my nightgown with all my senses engaged, feeling the material presence of Sri Aurobindo, basking in the impossibly strong force field.

Oh my heavens, I had darshan of Sri Aurobindo, a full-bodied, actual, bona fide darshan, and he wasn't even in the body.

What's remarkable is that I've never had an exceptional personal relation with Sri Aurobindo, or Mother (Mirra) either. For me, the intimate spiritual connection has been with the Divine, the Lord, the inner godhead, the universal

and transcendent Divine Mother—I haven't ordinarily felt the immediacy of a human guru.

But this, this was personal—Sri Aurobindo as God and man.

Wow, it was a stunner.

I couldn't believe it; I was shocked.

Talk about my money's worth for a visit to SASP.

Darshan with Sri Aurobindo—

Fifty years too late,⁵ but I got it anyway!

I stayed there in front of the altar till 4:00 a.m.

Then I crept up the stairs like a little mouse, went back to bed, and fell asleep.

NOTES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga IV, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 30, p. 104.
2. The overmind or overmental consciousness is a plane of consciousness above the mind that carries in itself a direct and masterful cognition of cosmic truth. For more on the significance of Siddhi Day, see <https://sasp.collaboration.org/activities/november-24>.
3. The samadhi, the tomb where Sri Aurobindo and Mother are interred, is a spiritual memorial found at the center of the main complex of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India. Visitors to the samadhi often report profound feelings of spiritual presence.
4. *Pranam* is an expression of homage and obeisance.
5. Sri Aurobindo left the physical body in December 1950.

LYNDA LESTER edited *Collaboration* for ten years, is a current board member of the Sri Aurobindo Association, and has given many presentations at AUM Integral Yoga conferences.

I Fell in Love with a Poem

DIANE THOME

HOW DOES A YOUNG AMERICAN GIRL WHO WANTS to be a composer become deeply interested in Sri Aurobindo? It was a long process!

When I was 12 years old, my remarkable mentor and first composition teacher, Robert Strassburg, introduced me to the Vedas and the Upanishads. Coming from a European Jewish family, I found these ancient Sanskrit

texts, the foundation of eastern religions, a momentous discovery. Next, living in Israel from 1963 to 1964, I met another remarkable mentor, Hungarian composer Alexander Uriah Boscovich. He often spoke of Sri Aurobindo's iconic philosophical work, *The Life Divine*, and dedicated his last composition to Sri Aurobindo.



In 1977 I moved from Binghamton, New York, to Seattle, Washington, and joined the theory/composition faculty, School of Music, University of Washington. A year later I attended a lecture at the Theosophical Society by M.P. Pandit, secretary to Sri Aurobindo's spiritual companion, the Mother. This distinguished writer was the most luminous individual I had ever encountered. After the lecture I asked his American host, Ron Jorgensen, if there was a Sri Aurobindo study group in Seattle. "Yes," he said, "I have one and we meet every week."

Thus began my connection to an Integral Yoga community that has lasted to the present day and enriched my life immeasurably. Over the years we have studied many different works by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, hosted retreats with distinguished guests such as M.P. Pandit and Rand Hicks, and expanded our community. I continue to meet many people through the study group and enjoy wonderful friendships. One question often comes up during introductory conversations: How did you first discover Sri Aurobindo and become involved with Integral Yoga? My answer is quite simple: I fell in love with a poem. *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo's poetic masterpiece, remains my greatest spiritual inspiration.

Having recovered from a long brain illness and retired from two careers, composer and university professor, I was urged to write a memoir [www.dianethome.com]. As the book evolved, describing many facets of my creative, professional, academic, and personal lives, I realized that evocative titles given to many of my compositions were symbolic expressions of my interior life and aspiration, a poetic thread connecting my artistic and spiritual paths. These include *All This, Bright Air/Brilliant Fire*, *Celestial Canopy*, *Estuaries of Enchantment*, *Like a Seated Swan*, *Masks of Eternity*, *Silver Deer*, *Spiral Journey*, *Stepping Inward*, *To Search the Spacious World*, *UnfoldEntwine*, and *Unseen Buds*.

Now, at 80 years of age, I am profoundly grateful for the immense blessings of my life—fortuitous circumstances, magical encounters, supportive family, rich friendships, spiritual community, inspiring teachers and friends—that have brought me to the grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

DIANE THOME has been a member of the Seattle Integral Yoga Community since 1978.



Walking the Path of Beauty

JAN MASLOW

WE'RE LIVING IN AMAZING AND CHALLENGING times. As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's birth, unprecedented numbers of people around the world are awakening to a sense of identity beyond ego. And, at the same time, fear, anger, and hatred are erupting out of the collective subconscious at an accelerated pace. This may seem like a contradiction and the tendency to react to these eruptions with horror, discouragement, or despair may be strong.

However, if we look at this apparent contradiction in light of the new consciousness that Sri Aurobindo devoted his life to manifesting, it makes perfect sense. This new consciousness, which he referred to as "the supramental," has the power not only to awaken in us a larger sense of self, but also to transform the very substance and functioning of our minds, hearts, and bodies so they become capable of expressing the divine being, consciousness, and bliss in their fullness, free of distortion.

For this transformative process to work, all the limiting and distorting habits of the ego need to come to the surface where they can be seen, surrendered, and transformed into their divine counterparts. What better

way to honor Sri Aurobindo's anniversary than to offer ourselves as instruments of that transformative power.

But how to do that?

THE POSSIBILITY OF BEAUTY

I've found the path of beauty to be a powerful one for cultivating an attitude of receptivity to this ever-present possibility of transformation—a path that is full of sweetness and opens readily to love.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that beauty is the manifestation of ananda in form, that it is inherent in all forms, whether the form be physical, a thought, or an emotion, and that it holds an irresistible charm and attraction for the human heart and soul. No aspect of the Divine is more attractive to the heart of embodied beings than "...the miracle of eternal beauty, an unseizable secret of divine harmonies, the compelling magic of an irresistible universal charm and attraction...."¹

WALKING THE PATH OF BEAUTY

As I conceive of it, the path of beauty is twofold. It involves, first, becoming more deeply attentive to the beauty that is easy to see but which we so often ignore—

The key to the practice is to start by establishing a stable inner stance from which to view the activities of your mind, heart, and body.

anything from a graceful turn of phrase to the hushed magic of twilight. And secondly, it involves cultivating a deeper intuitive ability to see the beauty which is hidden but striving to emerge more fully under the influence of the supramental force.

So how to walk this path?

Sri Aurobindo's collaborator in this work of manifesting the supramental consciousness was a woman who came to be known as the Mother. On a number of occasions, she recommended a practice that involves reviewing the day from an inner stance—ideally from the psychic being or inmost self, but at least from a place of quiet witnessing.

IMAGE: CHARLES-ANTOINE COYPEL



She said that when done on a regular basis, it had the power to completely transform our life.

Recently a variation of this practice came to mind in which beauty is the focus of the review. I've been finding this both enjoyable to do and powerfully transformative.

The key to the practice is to start by establishing a stable inner stance from which to view the activities of your mind, heart, and body. Doing it from a place of identification, judgement, or reactivity only strengthens the tendencies you're aspiring to have transformed. So the first step is always to sit quietly for a few moments and enter within to a place of calm and ease from which you can review the experience of the day gently and dispassionately.

I've broken the practice down into three parts for the sake of clarity, but you can combine or do them separately in any way that works for you.

PART 1: DEEPENING OUR EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY

Having established yourself in a quiet inner space, gently scan through your experience of the day noticing moments that held even a little taste of beauty—it could be an expression of physical beauty, a beautiful exchange between you and another person, an interaction you witnessed between other people, something you read or heard, or something simple like a passing glance exchanged with someone at the supermarket that for some reason touched your heart. These may be moments you recognized as they happened, or ones you overlooked at the time and are noticing now.

In a passage from *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo provides a guide for how we can take those moments and deepen our experience of the beauty they contained. He says that the search for beauty is only in its beginning a satisfaction in the beauty of form, the beauty which appeals to the physical senses and desires. It is only in the middle a satisfaction in the beauty of the ideas seized, the emotions aroused. But behind and beyond all this, the soul of beauty in us desires the uplifting delight of an absolute beauty in all things that we feel to be present, but which the senses by themselves cannot give. When

we can get the touch of this universal and absolute beauty, this sense of its revelation in anything—the beauty of a flower, an action, an event, a human life, an idea, a stroke of the brush—it is then that the sense of beauty in us is really, powerfully, entirely satisfied.²

Choose one of the moments of beauty from the day, and let yourself become absorbed in the physical sensations, the sights and sounds of it—the colors, shapes, textures, tone of voice, the expression on a person's face—whatever it may be—and really drink in the beauty of it, letting it nourish the cells of your body.

Then let yourself become aware of any inspiring thoughts or insights, any uplifting emotions that arose then, or arise now, in connection with the beauty and take a moment to let them fully permeate your mind and heart.

And finally, without striving, sit quietly for a short time and aspire to get a sense of that beauty which transcends the particulars of the moment, a sense of the all-pervading ananda that is expressing as, and through, those forms, thoughts, emotions—and let that vibrate throughout your consciousness.

PART 2: IDENTIFYING THAT WHICH BLOCKS OUR EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY

This next part of the practice is an effective way to help neutralize whatever negative karmic impressions may have accumulated over the course of the day, and to weaken the karmic tendencies they may represent.

Once again, start by establishing an inner stance and review your experience of the day, this time looking for those moments in which beauty seemed to be absent—when there was just a sense of dullness or a strong sense of ugliness.

Choose one of those moments and, without making any effort, quietly aspire to be shown any activities of the ego that helped to cover over beauty. You might notice a tension in the body, or a fatigue or dullness that limited your ability to perceive it. You may have been focused on how the object, person, or situation would be useful to you—how it could satisfy or thwart a desire or preference. You might notice expectations that weren't met; attachments

The soul of beauty in us desires the uplifting delight of an absolute beauty in all things that we feel to be present, but which the senses by themselves cannot give.

that were threatened; stories, memories, associations that were superimposed on the situation coloring your experience of it. There may have been biases, judgments, or opinions that distorted your experience of what was actually present.

The key here is to not be identified with any of these mechanisms of the ego. They are natural, innocent, and arise on their own. Judging or reacting to them only strengthens the tendency for them to arise. As you gently, compassionately identify these movements, you can offer them to divine consciousness for transformation, and then sit quietly observing your experience as it does its work.

Finally, you can ask the beauty that was there behind the veil of egoic perception to reveal itself, or ask how you might have helped it to be expressed in that situation. Then sit quietly and, without using the mind to try to concoct a response, just notice what arises in your experience. If a new insight does arise, take a moment to deeply re-experience the situation in light of that insight. If no insights arise, there's no need to be concerned. One may show up later in a dream, in something you see or read, or arise spontaneously in the midst of things.

PART 3: PRIMING YOURSELF TO EXPERIENCE BEAUTY

This next part involves doing a preview of the day ahead, or of a particular event you anticipate might be challenging. It's a way of priming your mind, heart, and nervous system to be more sensitized to the presence of beauty, to experience it more fully, and to facilitate its emergence.

As before, you start by settling into a quiet inner stance and from there visualize what you anticipate the day or the particular event will be like. Look for moments of potential beauty and sit quietly to fully absorb them into all parts of your being. You can also set a gentle intention to notice and appreciate them more deeply in real time.

Then look for moments of potential challenge, conflict, ugliness, and ask to be shown how to allow beauty to shine through. Again, don't try to concoct something with the mind, just sit quietly and see what intuitively arises. If something does emerge, take a moment to fully absorb what that feels like.

CONCLUSION

Here's the practice in brief:

- Start by going within.
- Review your experience of the day.

Let beauty be your constant ideal...

The beauty of the soul
The beauty of sentiments
The beauty of thoughts
The beauty of the action
The beauty in the work

...so that nothing comes out of your hands which is not an expression of pure and harmonious beauty.
And the Divine Help shall always be with you.³

- Identify moments where beauty was evident and enter into them more deeply.
- Identify moments where beauty seemed absent and then identify the egoic movements of mind, vital, and body that obscured it.
- Preview a day or event to come, anticipating moments of potential beauty, as well as moments of potential challenge, conflict, or ugliness.
- Ask to be intuitively shown how to see and/or express the beauty that is always potentially present.

I like concluding this practice by imagining my individual consciousness, along with whatever sense of beauty and ananda I've felt, expanding endlessly in all directions. As it expands, I aspire to recognize this infinite "space" to be nothing other than the divine consciousness—That within which all beings, all things exist, and out of which all is forever born and reborn.

NOTES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother with Letters on the Mother, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA)*, vol. 32, p. 20.
2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, vol. 25, p. 144.
3. The Mother, *On Education, Collected Works of the Mother*, vol. 12, p. 232.

JAN MASLOW'S interest has been in finding ways to help fulfill our human potential for love, joy, and creativity in all aspects of life.



The Role of the Avatar

What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme. —The Mother¹

Since the beginning of the earth, wherever and whenever there was the possibility of manifesting a ray of the Consciousness, I was there. —The Mother²

MARTHA ORTON

HUMANITY INHERENTLY HAS A SENSE OF A HIGHER and better life beyond our usual earthly existence. Those who believe in a higher power often seek solace in such an idea and also hope, or even expect, that a divine presence has lived among us in the past and may do so again. They also may believe that the Divine is involved in life and cares about humanity to the extent that a personal relationship with the Divine can be a component of daily life. Such a view is consistent with the beliefs in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, especially for those who accept them as the divine presence that engages with them in their spiritual seeking and also offers the potential to transform their human nature to a higher expression of itself.

In his description of the evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo explains that the purpose of human life is to evolve in consciousness and to engage in a transformative process which brings all of humanity, in fact all of creation, closer to the Divine and, ultimately, to union with the

Divine in a wonderful Oneness. We cannot imagine this process being at all possible without help from a higher power. While the Divine is always involved in life on earth and involved with humanity, at times the Divine has made the sacrifice of taking on human form and living among us, doing so from its great love and compassion. These beings who have made this sacrifice, divine beings in human form, are spoken of as *avatars*. For many in the Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are seen as the most recent avatars to live among us on earth. As Sri Aurobindo has described, human nature benefits from the presence of the avatar as an intermediary, a being close to our humanity and whose example we can use as a model.

Sri Aurobindo has written about the role of the avatar in multiple texts, including in *Essays on the Gita*, where he gives specific focus to the avatar in the form of Lord Krishna, the aspect and form of the Divine central to the Gita. Also, writing on the theme of offering and sacrifice in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, he addresses the nature of the

The purpose of human life is to evolve in consciousness and to engage in a transformative process which brings all of creation, ultimately, to union with the Divine in a wonderful Oneness.

sacrifice which the Divine makes when it comes to earth in human form. We also discover much about the role the avatar plays in human spirituality in Sri Aurobindo's profound small volume, *The Mother*. The present essay proposes to highlight some of the aspects of this topic which Sri Aurobindo has shared with us with greater eloquence and fullness in his writings.

The primary and central role played by the avatar is to establish a physical, concrete link between heaven and earth, the Divine and its creation. Sri Aurobindo explains in his conceptualization of the evolution of consciousness that not only did the Divine create the universe and all in it out of itself, but the Divine is naturally integrally within it (i.e., involved in it in the most literal sense). Furthermore the concept of *Brahman* [the Supreme

Reality] necessarily includes the inherent connection between the Divine and the manifestation, for as Sri Aurobindo quotes from the Bhagavad Gita, "All is the Divine Being."³ Sri Aurobindo gives us the most complete and comprehensive interpretation of Brahman in asserting that this applies to all of the material universe down to the atomic level. He writes: "For all here is God, is the Spirit or Self-existence, is Brahman, *ekamevādvitīyam*,—there is nothing else, nothing other and different from it and there can be nothing else, can be nothing other and different from it...."⁴ Accepting this as truth, we might ask why such a physical link as the presence of the avatar is necessary.

The answer to this salient question also lies within Sri Aurobindo's conceptualization of the evolution of

consciousness; for he explains that what is involved must evolve—that is, the Divine presence in the creation both enables the evolution of its consciousness and makes this evolution inevitable. The avatar comes to earth to help advance this process—to enable humanity and all the material world to evolve and manifest their inherent divine nature more fully than they might otherwise be able to do. One of the most powerful and compelling passages in the Gita is Krishna’s declaration to Arjuna, the warrior who faces the challenge of battling his kin, of his presence and purpose, which Sri Aurobindo translates as follows:

Many are my lives that are past, and thine also,
O Arjuna; all of them I know, but thou knowest

not, O scourge of the foe. Though I am the unborn, though I am imperishable in my self-existence, though I am the Lord of all existences, yet I stand upon my own Nature and I come into birth by my self-Maya. For whensoever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of unrighteousness, then I loose myself forth into birth. For the deliverance of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for the enthroning of the Right I am born from age to age. He who knoweth thus in its right principles my divine birth and my divine work, when he abandons his body, comes not to rebirth, he comes to Me, O Arjuna. Delivered from liking and fear and wrath, full of me, taking refuge in me, many purified by austerity of knowledge have arrived at my nature of being (*madbhāvam*), the divine nature of the Purushottama [the Supreme Divine]. As men approach me, so I accept them to my love (*bhajāmi*); men follow in every way my path, O son of Pritha.⁵

While recognizing the role of the avatar as bringing humanity closer to the Divine, Sri Aurobindo additionally asserts that the avatar’s purpose extends even farther to enabling and assisting in the transformation of human nature into its divine counterpart. He writes specifically to this point in *Essays on the Gita* when he explains that it is not only for upholding the Dharma that Lord Krishna has come to earth to assist Arjuna:

But we have to remark carefully that the upholding of Dharma in the world is not the only object of the descent of the Avatar, that great mystery of the Divine manifest in humanity; for the upholding of the Dharma is not an all-sufficient object in itself, not the supreme possible aim for the manifestation of a Christ, a Krishna, a Buddha, but is only the general condition of a higher aim and a more supreme and divine utility. For there are two aspects of the divine birth; one is a descent, the birth of God in humanity, the Godhead manifesting itself in the human form and nature, the eternal Avatar; the other is an ascent, the birth of man into the Godhead, man rising into the divine nature and consciousness, *madbhāvam āgataḥ*; it is the being born anew in a second birth of the soul. It is that new birth which Avatarhood

IMAGE: MAXPIXEL / PARAG GAIKWAD



Since the divine reality exists at levels beyond our grasp, as the transcendent and the universal, humanity is blessed with the Divine in the personal, individual form of the avatar.

and the upholding of the Dharma are intended to serve.⁶

Sri Aurobindo further emphasizes the significance he gives to the role of the avatar in transforming humanity:

This double aspect in the Gita's doctrine of Avatarhood is apt to be missed by the cursory reader satisfied, as most are, with catching a superficial view of its profound teachings, and it is missed too by the formal commentator petrified in the rigidity of the schools. Yet it is necessary, surely, to the whole meaning of the doctrine. Otherwise the Avatar idea would be only a dogma, a popular superstition, or an imaginative or mystic deification of historical or legendary supermen, not what the Gita makes all its teaching, a deep philosophical and religious truth and an essential part of or step to the supreme mystery of all, *rahasyam uttamam*.

If there were not this rising of man into the Godhead to be helped by the descent of God into humanity, Avatarhood for the sake of the Dharma would be an otiose phenomenon, since mere Right, mere justice or standards of virtue can always be upheld by the divine omnipotence through its ordinary means, by great men or great movements, by the life and work of sages and kings and religious teachers, without any actual incarnation.⁷

Reflecting on the role of the avatar, we cannot but recognize the vast extent of divine compassion in engaging so directly with humanity at its own level of being. Without this direct example to lead us forward, we would be much more likely to stay mired in the smallness of our surface being and nature. Sri Aurobindo describes the great mission and purpose of the avatar:

The Avatar comes as the manifestation of the divine nature in the human nature, the apocalypse of its Christhood, Krishnhood, Buddhahood, in

order that the human nature may by moulding its principle, thought, feeling, action, being on the lines of that Christhood, Krishnhood, Buddhahood transfigure itself into the divine. The law, the Dharma which the Avatar establishes is given for that purpose chiefly; the Christ, Krishna, Buddha stands in its centre as the gate, he makes through himself the way men shall follow. That is why each Incarnation holds before men his own example and declares of himself that he is the way and the gate; he declares too the oneness of his humanity with the divine being, declares that the Son of Man and the Father above from whom he has descended are one, that Krishna in the human body, *mānuṣīm tanum āśritam*, and the supreme Lord and Friend of all creatures are but two revelations of the same divine Purushottama, revealed there in his own being, revealed here in the type of humanity.⁸

Further reflecting on the role of the avatar, we can feel deeply humbled and grateful for the concrete physical presence of the Divine on earth and consider the enormity of the sacrifice which this represents. Sri Aurobindo has written of the nature of this sacrifice in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, describing the concept of sacrifice as a dynamic process central to the Integral Yoga. He has written extensively on this concept and given it particular emphasis in three chapters of Book I of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. In the chapter titled "The Sacrifice, the Triune Path and the Lord of the Sacrifice," Sri Aurobindo describes two major forms of sacrifice that occur in the universe.

The first of these is the sacrifice made by the Divine through the descent of the *purusha* (the Self) from the vast transcendent oneness into the world and matter. This sacrifice, the highest and greatest, precedes the second, the sacrifice made by the manifest universe to the Divine. The sacrifice made by the Divine in coming into matter initiates and enables the sacrifice which the manifestation can make through its self-offering to the Divine. Sri Aurobindo states: "This descent, the sacrifice of the Purusha, the Divine Soul submitting itself to Force and

The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Supreme and far above all she creates. But something of her ways can be seen and felt through her embodiments.

Matter so that it may inform and illuminate them, is the seed of redemption of this world of Inconscience and Ignorance.”⁹

The second form of sacrifice is that made by the manifest existence in its unconscious or conscious growth towards the Divine. This sacrifice ultimately leads human beings onto the triune path of yoga, in which the paths of works, knowledge, and devotion merge, and to union with the Divine. The arduous and immeasurably lengthy sacrificial process of humanity’s evolution is indeed great. Yet we can barely imagine the magnitude of the sacrifice made by the Divine in taking on human form and living among us in that guise. The avatar takes on the human body, with all the difficulties and forms of suffering implied in this manifestation. Although the avatar has the capability of performing miracles and avoiding any form of personal suffering, he or she takes on the sufferings associated with life in a human body for our sake, showing how they can be endured as a form of redemption or overcome even within our nature. Sri Aurobindo conveys a sense of this reality in *Savitri*, as we can see in the following lines:

Thou hast come down into a struggling world.
To aid a blind and suffering mortal race,
To open to Light the eyes that could not see,
To bring down bliss into the heart of grief,
To make thy life a bridge twixt earth and heaven;
If thou wouldst save the toiling universe,
The vast universal suffering feel as thine:
Thou must bear the sorrow that thou claimst to heal;
The day-bringer must walk in darkest night.
He who would save the world must share its pain.
If he knows not grief, how shall he find grief’s cure?
If far he walks above mortality’s head,
How shall the mortal reach that too high path?
If one of theirs they see scale heaven’s peaks,
Men then can hope to learn that titan climb.
God must be born on earth and be as man.
That man being human may grow even as God.

He who would save the world must be one with
the world,
All suffering things contain in his heart’s space
And bear the grief and joy of all that lives.¹⁰

For humanity, immense gratitude needs to be our response, along with receptivity to change and transformation. We can ask ourselves the question: “Where would we be without some recognition in our awareness of the Divine?” The answer for most of us would be simply that we would feel lost. The very presence of the avatar assists humanity in its recognition of the reality of the Divine. Moreover, the actual physical presence of the Divine in human form also greatly assists in developing a personal relationship with the Divine, because the avatar is much more approachable than the vaster forms and aspects of the Divine. In essence, the greater divine reality is far too vast for the human mind to conceive of and, in its vastness, too impersonal for it to approach. Even if we could conceive of it, the Divine in its transcendent aspect would

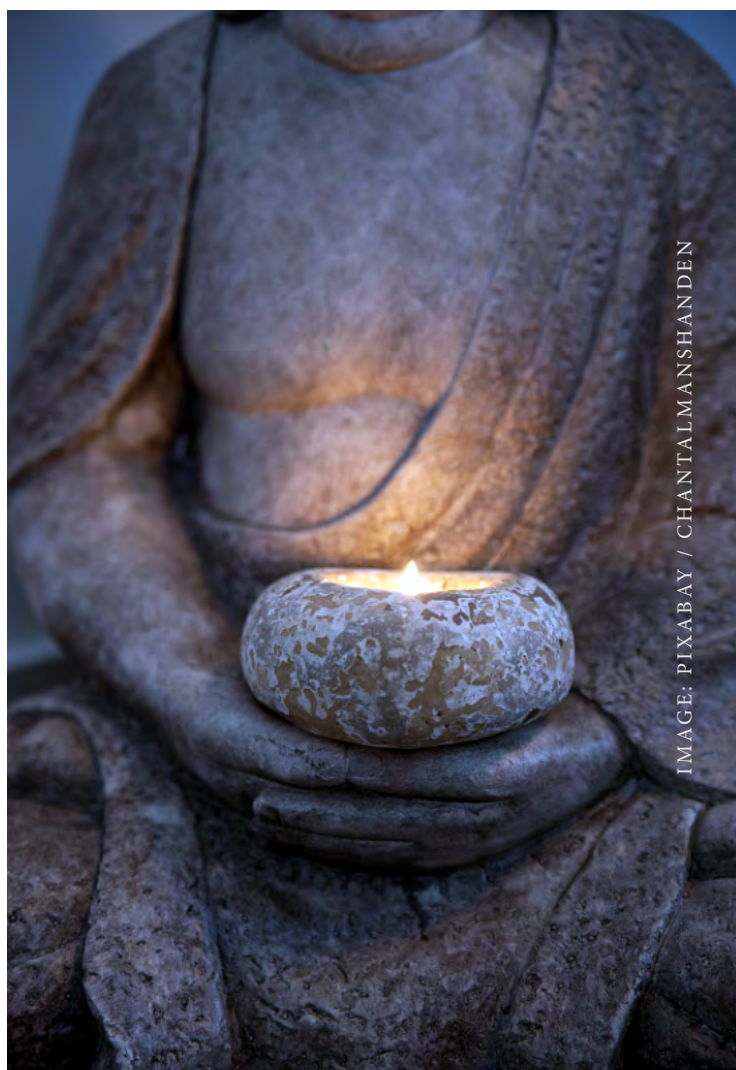


IMAGE: PIXABAY / CHANTALMANSANDEN

be overwhelming to us. Since the divine reality exists at levels beyond our grasp, as the transcendent and the universal, humanity is blessed with the Divine in the personal, individual form of the avatar. Humanity greatly needs the avatar in order to develop personal connection with the Divine. Without developing a personal relationship with the Divine, we can have little sense of guidance, and certainly little experience of emotional connection and devotion. The interplay and exchange of both of these is essential to our growth and transformation.

Sri Aurobindo explains that the presence of the avatar among humanity on earth offers a concrete example of how we can progress in our personal and individual development. He writes: "It is, we might say, to exemplify the possibility of the Divine manifest in the human being, so that man may see what that is and take courage and grow into it."¹¹ This presents itself as a dual action beginning with the birth of the Divine into human form, and subsequently followed by the ascent of humanity into its higher, divine nature. Moreover, the avatar offers a teaching which usually has become a sacred text for his or her followers to enrich their understanding and practice of the path which the avatar presents as a possibility for their future.

Sri Aurobindo also explains that the influence of the Divine on earth manifested in the form of the avatar leaves a lingering vibration and presence that continues to have profound and wide-reaching effect on human life and the evolutionary advance. Pertinent to this inspiring understanding, Sri Aurobindo writes: "The divine manifestation of a Christ, Krishna, Buddha in external humanity has for its inner truth the same manifestation of the eternal Avatar within in our own inner humanity. That which has been done in the outer human life of earth, may be repeated in the inner life of all human beings."¹²

Writing in *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo describes wonderfully all the ways in which the Divine interacts with humanity in its sacrifice of engagement with us and he also describes the necessity of our full receptivity and surrender to the Divine in order to receive the blessings offered to us. The following passages reflect some of the beauty of this text and speak powerfully to necessity of the role of the avatar:

The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence, 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. The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Supreme and far above all she creates. But something of her ways can be seen and felt through her embodiments and the more seizable because more defined and limited temperament and action of the goddess forms in whom she consents to be manifest to her creatures.

There are three ways of being of the Mother of which you can become aware when you enter into touch of oneness with the Conscious Force that upholds us and the universe. Transcendent, the original supreme Shakti, she stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever unmanifest mystery of the Supreme. Universal, the cosmic Mahashakti, she creates all these beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all these million processes and forces. Individual, she embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature.¹³

NOTES

1. The Mother, *Words of the Mother I, Collected Works of the Mother*, vol. 13, p. 4.
2. Ibid., p. 37.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA)*, vols. 21–22, p. 309.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita, CWSA*, vol. 19, p. 151.
5. Ibid., pp. 146–147.
6. Ibid., pp. 147–148.
7. Ibid., p. 149.
8. Ibid., pp. 148–149.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA*, vols. 23–24, p. 106.
10. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri, CWSA*, vols. 33–34, 536–537.
11. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita, CWSA*, vol. 19, p. 159.
12. Ibid., p. 160.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA*, vol. 32, p. 14.

MARTHA ORTON completed a Ph.D. in Sri Aurobindo studies and has written extensively on Integral Yoga. She has been a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for many years.



An Adventure in Consciousness

ANDREA VAN DE LOO

IN 1971, STILL LIVING IN THE NETHERLANDS, I READ an article in a Dutch magazine about Auroville, the “City of the Future” in South India, founded by the Mother in 1968. The Mother was Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual companion and head of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in nearby Pondicherry. I was particularly struck by one small quote from Sri Aurobindo:

All life is yoga.

These four simple words rang like bells in my mind. I didn’t know what they meant—I wondered if one was to do *asanas* (yoga postures) in the kitchen—but it felt like the promise of an all-encompassing spiritual way of life. I had left the Catholic Church because it had been too dogmatic for me. I cut the picture of the spiral nebula design of the city out of the magazine and put it on my wall. It gave me hope.

Within a year I found myself in Pondicherry. I arrived a few days before Mother’s 94th birthday in February 1972. I had the chance to see Mother in person. After seeing her, I wept for three days. Wherever I went, bittersweet tears kept streaming down my face—pure joy at having been seen, at finally being known to her *and* to myself, mixed with the grief that it had taken so very, very long, since the beginning of my countless lifetimes of searching for God. In front of her, in one fell swoop, all my veils were torn and my soul stood revealed. I had come home to myself.

At the ashram, I befriended Ron Jorgensen, an American disciple, who introduced me to Satprem’s book *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*. Discovering the essence of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga—to establish the divine consciousness on earth—my enthusiasm knew

no bounds. I experienced immense relief to find a spiritual path that was not focused on the hereafter, but on transforming life itself. It seemed to promise a path that might alleviate the suffering in the world, and I could participate in that adventure. My whole being said YES to that.

Next, I worked my way through *The Synthesis of Yoga* by Sri Aurobindo. I was greatly impressed by his impeccable logic and the brilliance of how he seemed to pack everything he wanted to transmit into single but complex long sentences that always came to a clear full stop. Every sentence and paragraph seemed like a packet of transmission of his knowledge. I also noticed that whenever a question arose in me, it would invariably be answered in the next paragraph.

Soon Mother granted my request to go and live in Auroville to be a “willing servitor of the Divine,” to do my part in the evolution of consciousness. Rod Hemsell, a young American resident at the time, started reading *Savitri* out loud to a small group of us in Auroville. I loved listening to his ethereal voice, which seemed to transmit the poetry from a higher dimension. I began receiving the gifts of that great epic poem by Sri Aurobindo. *Savitri* has been a steady companion in my life ever since, which has now been 50 years.

Looking at Mother’s photographs was always an intensely vivid experience, ranging from being completely in love with her to feeling her penetrating gaze explore my depths. For a long time, when I looked at Sri Aurobindo’s photographs, I would be in awe of his immense silence. He was like the Himalayas. If God had a face, it was his, immutable, vast. After I read how Mother had experienced

him as utterly sweet, I detected the gentle smile hidden behind his facial hair and began to feel more at ease before him.

Later, when I came to Santa Cruz in California, I was happy to reconnect with June Maher, whom I had befriended during some of her visits to Auroville. I was always inspired and comforted by her powerful inner connection with Mother and Integral Yoga. With a small group of students of the yoga, we began meeting twice a month to read *Savitri*. We did that for many years until June left her body in 2014.

I also participated in several *Savitri* Immersions at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham ashram in Lodi, California. We would “immerse” ourselves for four consecutive days, taking turns reading that epic poem of 724 pages from beginning to end.

Since *Savitri* is mantric, it needs to be spoken and heard so the power of the words will resonate in the body. When I read out loud, I feel myself becoming an instrument of the transmission and feel particularly transported. In every canto I recognize parts of myself, my steps and stumblings on the way, as well as descriptions of world events and forces, both dark and light, and am reassured that the Divine is behind and within it all.

Some time ago, I joined a small group to explore chanting the Vedas and reading Sri Aurobindo’s commentary from *The Secret of the Veda*. The Veda consists of ancient Indian sacred verses passed along orally and much later transcribed. The purpose of the hymns is to guide and inspire the seeker from ignorance into knowledge and bliss. When I had tried to read the Veda by myself, I couldn’t relate to the strange imagery and language. Reading with others, each one of us taking turns to chant the verses, I experience a visceral uplifting and expansion of energy and consciousness. The verses seem to bypass the limitations of the rational mind and facilitate resonance, allowing the influence of transformation to be received not only in the mind, but in our very bodies. It is especially remarkable to me that the gods are actual forces within us, having only one goal, to support our emergence out of the “cave” and carry us into the light of union with the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo continues to inspire and guide my inner life.

ANDREA lived in Auroville from 1972 to 1978. Now in Santa Cruz, California, she is writing her memoirs.

Mother's Child

KINJAL SHAH

TO DEAR READERS AND MY FRIENDS ON THE PATH OF yoga led by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother:

My name is Kinjal Shah. I come from Gujarat, a western state in India. I was brought up in a Hindu family with my parents following the path of *Shrinathji*, a form of Sri Krishna. No one in my family followed or knew about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but I believe the Divine finds us and picks us for the purpose for which we are brought into this world.

The first time I saw Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's pictures was in elementary school, as the principal of the school was their follower. Our mornings started with a prayer in front of their photos. Most kids would close their eyes while praying, but I kept my eyes open and kept looking at the images. This was my first connection with the Mother. My soul knew what it wanted from an early age, and I felt I was the Mother's child. I am grateful to my parents that they never questioned my beliefs and never forced me to believe in what they believed in.

My journey on Sri Aurobindo's path continued when I later read a monthly edition of a book published by one of his followers titled *Sahaj Satsang: Casual Spiritual Discourse*. I started reading more of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's writings, which helped me get into a deeper consciousness instead of living on the surface. My faith in the Mother increased day by day. She has a unique way of opening up our hidden doors and showing us the light. Her love, grace, and light helped detangle my life, just as we untangle our hair when it gets tangled.

During my college days, I visited a study center in my hometown where we used to sing a prayer written by the

poet Sundaram titled "Tu Ridaye Vasanaari," [You Who Live in My Heart]. Each line of the prayer touched my inner cells and helped me surrender myself completely to my Lord and the Mother. Ever since, the Mother has been my companion, helping me stay away from desires, lust, anger, and ego. I feel her love, grace, and light, which have changed my life.

Sadhana (spiritual practice) becomes intense and then slows down again at times during our lives. It's like playing snakes and ladders. For each of us, the expression of mental consciousness varies according to our own limitations. We all have our imperfections and defects, and process ideas differently. Differences in opinion and egoic beliefs that we are right and others are wrong create disharmony. For centuries we have been separated from the Divine by hostile forces, and the human body is complex. But I feel our aim should be moving upwards toward our goal of becoming one with the Divine.

Since my husband and I moved to the U.S., we have found a study circle wherever we lived, be it the East Coast or the West Coast. We have many friends on the path of yoga who have taught me so much through their sadhana. I am in debt to them for their love and kindness. I feel blessed that the Mother and my Lord Sri Aurobindo chose me to be their child in this life and I could cross many lifetimes and births in just this one life to be one with them.



IMAGE: DAKSHINA VANZETTI

KINJAL SHAH considers herself to be simply the Mother's child.



A God's Labour

SRI AUROBINDO

I have gathered my dreams in a silver air
Between the gold and the blue
And wrapped them softly and left them there,
My jewelled dreams of you.

I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
Marrying the soil to the sky
And sow in this dancing planet midge
The moods of infinity.

But too bright were our heavens, too far away,
Too frail their ethereal stuff;
Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;
The roots were not deep enough.

He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend himself into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way.

IMAGE: PIXABAY / PUBLICDOMAINPICTURES



Coercing my godhead I have come down
Here on the sordid earth,
Ignorant, labouring, human grown
Twixt the gates of death and birth.

I have been digging deep and long
Mid a horror of filth and mire
A bed for the golden river's song,
A home for the deathless fire.

I have laboured and suffered in Matter's night
To bring the fire to man;
But the hate of hell and human spite
Are my meed since the world began.

For man's mind is the dupe of his animal self;
Hoping its lusts to win,
He harbours within him a grisly Elf
Enamoured of sorrow and sin.

The grey Elf shudders from heaven's flame
And from all things glad and pure;
Only by pleasure and passion and pain
His drama can endure.

All around is darkness and strife;
For the lamps that men call suns
Are but halfway gleams on this stumbling life
Cast by the Undying Ones.

Man lights his little torches of hope
That lead to a failing edge;
A fragment of Truth is his widest scope,
An inn his pilgrimage.

The Truth of truths men fear and deny,
The Light of lights they refuse;
To ignorant gods they lift their cry
Or a demon altar choose.

All that was found must again be sought,
Each enemy slain revives,
Each battle for ever is fought and refought
Through vistas of fruitless lives.

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one
And the Titan kings assail,
But I dare not rest till my task is done
And wrought the eternal will.

How they mock and sneer, both devils and men!
"Thy hope is Chimera's head
Painting the sky with its fiery stain;
Thou shalt fall and thy work lie dead.

"Who art thou that babblest of heavenly ease
And joy and golden room
To us who are waifs on inconscient seas
And bound to life's iron doom?

"This earth is ours, a field of Night
For our petty flickering fires.
How shall it brook the sacred Light
Or suffer a god's desires?

"Come, let us slay him and end his course!
Then shall our hearts have release
From the burden and call of his glory and force
And the curb of his wide white peace."

But the god is there in my mortal breast
Who wrestles with error and fate
And tramples a road through mire and waste
For the nameless Immaculate.

A voice cried, "Go where none have gone!
Dig deeper, deeper yet
Till thou reach the grim foundation stone
And knock at the keyless gate."

I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
At the very root of things
Where the grey Sphinx guards God's riddle sleep
On the Dragon's outspread wings.

I left the surface gauds of mind
And life's unsatisfied seas
And plunged through the body's alleys blind
To the nether mysteries.

I have delved through the dumb Earth's dreadful heart
And heard her black mass' bell.
I have seen the source whence her agonies part
And the inner reason of hell.

Above me the dragon murmurs moan
And the goblin voices flit;
I have pierced the Void where Thought was born,
I have walked in the bottomless pit.

On a desperate stair my feet have trod
Armoured with boundless peace,
Bringing the fires of the splendour of God
Into the human abyss.

He who I am was with me still;
All veils are breaking now.
I have heard His voice and borne His will
On my vast untroubled brow.

The gulf twixt the depths and the heights is bridged
And the golden waters pour
Down the sapphire mountain rainbow-ridged
And glimmer from shore to shore.

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth
And the undying suns here burn;
Through a wonder cleft in the bounds of birth
The incarnate spirits yearn

Like flames to the kingdoms of Truth and Bliss:
Down a gold-red stairway wend
The radiant children of Paradise
Clarioning darkness' end.

A little more and the new life's doors
Shall be carved in silver light
With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
In a great world bare and bright.

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,
For in a raiment of gold and blue
There shall move on the earth embodied and fair
The living truth of you.

—*Collected Poems, Collected Works of
Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 2, pp. 534–538



Exploring *The Life Divine*

Some Highlights of a Pilgrimage

SHRADDHAVAN

IMAGE: PIXABAY / LARISA-K

The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe.

—Sri Aurobindo.¹

THE LIFE DIVINE STUDY CIRCLE AT SAVITRI BHAVAN (a center in Auroville devoted to the study of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*) was launched in response to the enthusiasm of a number of Aurovilians, several of whom had already followed a series of lectures given by Dr. Ananda Reddy. At the opening session about 25 people participated. Since only two or three paragraphs are studied in each hour-long weekly session, it is to be expected that it will take a considerable amount of time to complete our study. What a pilgrimage this has been! And how exciting it is to be able to look up to the concluding summit, the goal, the powerful evocation of the fulfillment: a divine life upon earth! Though many more milestones still lie ahead, perhaps something can already be shared about this adventure.

When the sessions began, many of the participants had already been following the weekly *Savitri* study sessions over the previous years, exploring the mantric epic from beginning to end three or four times, gradually becoming somewhat familiar with the psychological symbolism and evocative imagery of Sri Aurobindo's poetic expression; but embarking on *The Life Divine* seemed to demand a different kind of approach. While the mantric rhythms, rich vocabulary, and suggestive sound patterns of *Savitri*, evoking powerful images and stirring deep emotions, had carried us delightfully through one reading after another like a swift-flowing river, we now had to grow accustomed to a more leisurely pacing as the Master led us systematically, step by step, from darkness towards an ever-increasing light, gathering whatever gleams and glimpses we could grasp of the astounding richness of his all-encompassing vision.

On the way, we were often surprised and delighted by a synchronicity in the two explorations: *The Life Divine* clarifying *Savitri* and *Savitri* illumining *The Life Divine*, the prose read on Wednesdays reflecting the poetry read on Sundays, and the two reinforcing and supporting each other. We also often felt that our brains were being challenged to stretch and grow in order to be able to assimilate even a little of the riches that were being shared with us. From the point we have reached today, it seems possible to point out for the interest of other travelers some of the highlights that stand out in memory.

HOW WE PROCEED

Although the atmosphere of the study sessions is informal, the participants take them seriously. They arrive

in good time and sit quietly until everyone has arrived, taken their place, opened their book, and found the paragraph where the day's study will begin. Then we listen to and mentally follow a beautiful voice chanting Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri mantra, invoking the light of the supreme truth to illumine every part of our being. There may be a brief review of what has been read in the previous session, or earlier in the chapter; then one member of the group reads the first passage of the day. Usually it is a full paragraph, but occasionally we may pause in the middle of a very long one.

After this first reading aloud, everyone present then takes the time to re-read the passage to themselves in silence. When all are ready, we then go through each sentence in the passage again together. In the course of this third reading questions may be raised about the meaning of a word or phrase, and some clarifying discussion will follow, but the aim is to remain focused on the text, and to allow Sri Aurobindo's powerful words and mantric rhythms to penetrate us and build up our understanding. A second paragraph may be read in the same way and, if the text is not too difficult to follow, even a third—but very rarely more. An atmosphere of intense concentration establishes itself.

At the end of the hour a few moments are spent in silence, and then we express our gratitude to Sri Aurobindo with *namaskar* (a traditional Indian gesture of respect) before parting. This procedure has been modeled on the practice established earlier in the *Savitri* study circle.

THE BOOK AND THE CHAPTERS

As is well known, Sri Aurobindo started writing *The Life Divine* as a series of articles in the monthly issues of his journal *Arya*, which ran from August 1914 to January 1919. Each installment was written immediately before publication. He subsequently revised this original material thoroughly and added much more before it was published in three volumes in 1939 and 1940 by the Arya Publishing House, Calcutta. The first of these volumes covered what is now known as Book One, while the others were devoted to Book Two, which is divided into two parts. After several subsequent editions, with some revisions by Sri Aurobindo, the term "Books" was introduced in the first one-volume American edition of 1949, and has been retained in later editions.

The titles given by Sri Aurobindo to these divisions serve as signposts in the course of the journey. In Book One, "Omnipresent Reality and the Universe," after some

If there is any higher light of illumined intuition which works with occasional displays as of the northern lights in our material skies, there also we need not fear to aspire.

introductory chapters, Sri Aurobindo explores the essential principles of the origin and structure of the manifestation of which we are a part. Book Two, “The Knowledge and the Ignorance—The Spiritual Evolution,” is subdivided in two parts: Part One, “The Infinite Consciousness and the Ignorance,” focuses on relationships between the infinite and omniscient consciousness that has given rise to the universe and the ignorant state of human beings in the process of evolution; Part Two, “The Knowledge and the Spiritual Foundation,” looks ahead to evolutionary potentialities and developments.

Each of the Books has 28 chapters, giving 56 in all. The two parts of Book Two each contain 14 chapters. All are prefaced by one or more quotations from the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita. For us beginners, these quotations were mysterious. We took help from M.P. Pandit’s book *Legends in The Life Divine*,² which provides lucid explanations for each of them. We soon found that these epigraphs (“mottoes” as Sri Aurobindo called them, “legends” according to M.P. Pandit) refer to themes explored in the corresponding chapter. Sri Aurobindo apparently used them to indicate parallels between the insights of the ancient rishis and sages and his own account, based on knowledge gained from his yogic experience and addressed to the mind of modern humanity. In 1913, Sri Aurobindo noted that part of his mission was to restate the truths of the Veda and Vedanta in terms accessible to the modern mind. In *The Life Divine*, the ancient truths, illumined by his own experience, have been made accessible to the human reason.

The chapters grow longer as the book goes on: the 28 chapters of Book One cover 304 pages in all; the 14 chapters of Book Two, Part One cover 346 pages, while those of Book Two, Part Two cover 448. The final chapter covers 57 pages, but Sri Aurobindo launches us gently on the long pilgrimage with the first chapter, which has only 7.

The title of Book One is “Omnipresent Reality and the Universe.” That is the theme of the first 28 chapters of Sri Aurobindo’s exposition of his vision of the world that we live in, our place in it, and the perspectives for its future evolution. In this essay we shall focus principally

on the first Book, but towards the end a few passages from Book Two will also be presented.

HIGHLIGHT 1: EMBARKING ON THE PILGRIMAGE

Chapter 1 is called “The Human Aspiration,” and in it Sri Aurobindo begins by pointing out that there is a persistent aspiration in humanity for some higher state, which we may name God or light or freedom or immortality—these are among the labels that human beings have put on their longing for what Sri Aurobindo refers to as “a divine life.” He tells us that this persistent aspiration in humanity through the millennia is a sure indication that the possibility of realizing the high things for which we aspire is coded into us. We could not aspire for them unless that possibility was intended to be achieved some day. Sri Aurobindo poses the question: “Can this diviner life be achieved here on Earth, in the material universe?” He concludes that it can, and that this is the very purpose and justification of our existence, and the goal of evolution.

Apart from its two “mottoes” from the Rig Veda, “The Human Aspiration” consists of just five luminous paragraphs that point the way ahead. They resonate powerfully in the memory, and would be worth learning by heart. In them we may hear Sri Aurobindo’s voice resonating majestically through all the planes and levels of the universe, over past, present, and future, heralding a new era, assuring us of the fulfillment of the age-old aspirations of humankind. This is our first highlight:

The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last,—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.... And if there is any higher light of illumined intuition or self-revealing truth which is now in man either obstructed and inoperative or works with intermittent glancings as if from behind a veil or with occasional displays as of the northern lights in our material skies, then there also we need not fear to aspire. For it is likely that such is the next higher state of consciousness of which Mind is only a form and veil, and through the splendours of that light may lie the path of our progressive self-enlargement

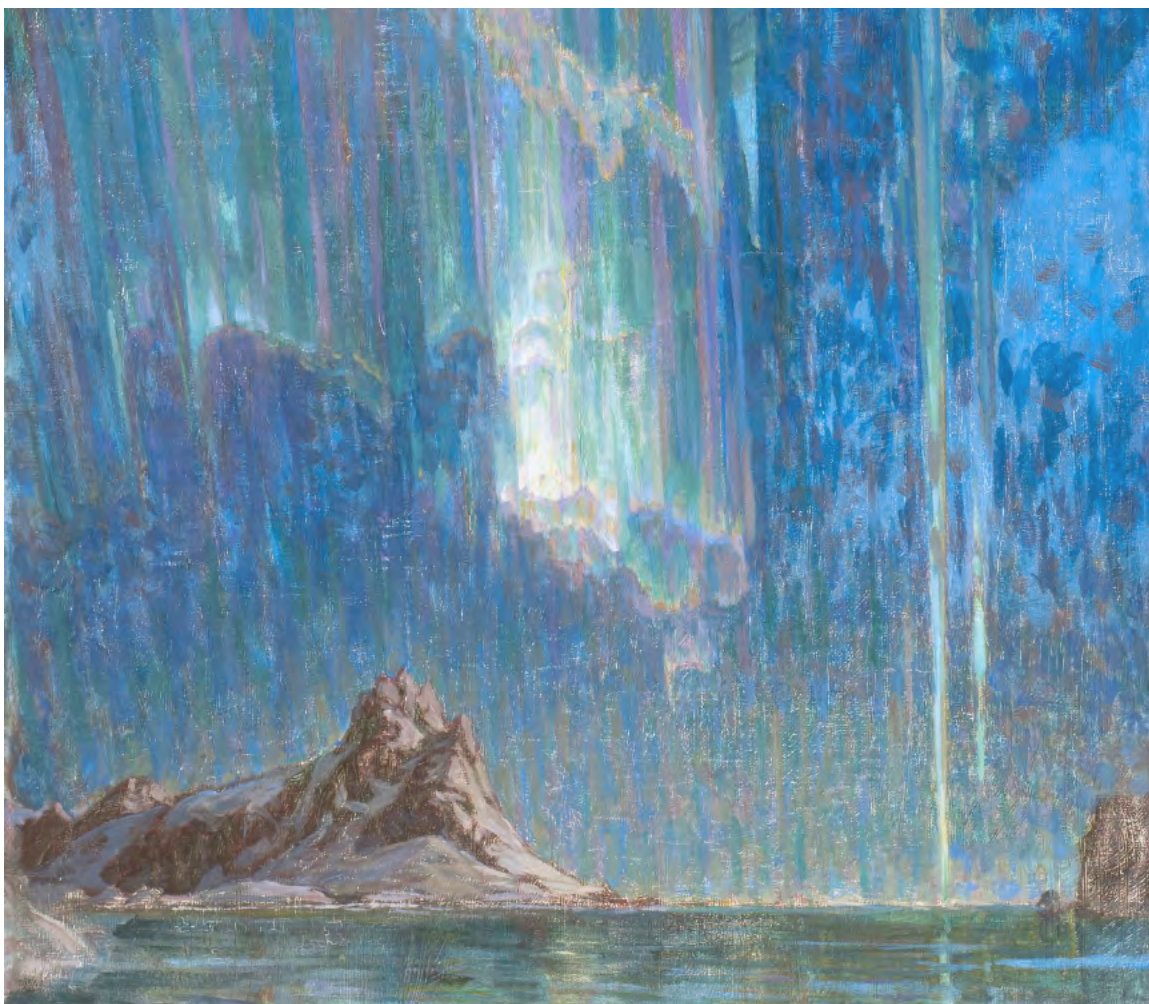


IMAGE: ARTVEE / ANNA BOBERG

into whatever highest state is humanity's ultimate resting-place.³

TWO NEGATIONS

In the next two chapters Sri Aurobindo examines two major denials to this aspiration for a divine life on earth. The first is that of the materialist, for whom only matter is real, and who considers all other aspects of our existence to be more or less illusory moonshine, believing our higher longings to be unrealistic and unrealizable. Sri Aurobindo does not entirely dismiss the materialist position; he confirms that it has been of great value in the evolution of consciousness and can continue to be so if it does not restrict its impartial quest for ever-widening knowledge.

On the other hand, "The Refusal of the Ascetic" is much more dangerous: the spiritual urge which makes us feel that what we are aiming for, the wonderful higher state that we are aspiring for, cannot possibly be achieved here on earth—an urge that has drawn away so many souls into other realms. They have attained great spiritual

achievements, but left life on earth very much as it was. However, Sri Aurobindo also says that we should never underestimate the great contribution made to our human evolution by the disciplined efforts of all those great souls; and now, he suggests, it is time for humanity to move on towards a more all-embracing view of the manifestation we belong to. He will share that view with us in the course of this monumental and revelatory work.

HIGHLIGHT 2: THE FOUNDATION OF SRI AUROBINDO'S WORLD VIEW

The nature of the omnipresent reality of which we are a part forms the theme of the following four chapters: Chapter 4, "Reality Omnipresent"; Chapter 5, "The Destiny of the Individual"; Chapter 6, "Man in the Universe"; and Chapter 7, "The Ego and the Dualities." The conclusions reached in the course of these four chapters are summarized in the closing paragraph of Chapter 7. It consists of seven resounding sentences, which I have separated below for greater emphasis.

How is it possible for us, who are limited by our physical senses, to be able to test and verify things that are necessarily beyond the reach of the senses?

We have then the manifestation of the divine Conscious Being in the totality of physical Nature as the foundation of human existence in the material universe.

We have the emergence of that Conscious Being in an involved and inevitably evolving Life, Mind and Supermind as the condition of our activities; for it is this evolution which has enabled man to appear in Matter and it is this evolution which will enable him progressively to manifest God in the body,—the universal Incarnation.

We have in egoistic formation the intermediate and decisive factor which allows the One to emerge as the conscious Many out of that indeterminate totality general, obscure and formless which we call the subconscious,—*hr̥dya samudra*, the ocean heart in things of the Rig Veda.

We have the dualities of life and death, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, truth and error, good and evil as the first formations of egoistic consciousness, the natural and inevitable outcome of its attempt to realise unity in an artificial construction of itself exclusive of the total truth, good, life, and delight of being in the universe.

We have the dissolution of this egoistic construction by the self-opening of the individual to the universe and to God as the means of that supreme fulfilment to which egoistic life is only a prelude even as animal life was only a prelude to the human.

We have the realisation of the All in the individual by the transformation of the limited ego into a conscious centre of the divine unity and freedom as the term at which the fulfilment arrives.

And we have the outflowing of the infinite and absolute Existence, Truth, Good and Delight of being on the Many in the world as the divine result

towards which the cycles of our evolution move. This is the supreme birth which maternal Nature holds in herself; of this she strives to be delivered.⁴

These seven points form the foundation of Sri Aurobindo's unique world-view, which he expounds in detail in the course of this great book.

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 8, "Methods of Vedantic Knowledge," discusses the methods that are to be used in our investigation. How is it possible for us, who are limited by our physical senses, to be able to test and verify things that are necessarily beyond the reach of the senses? How can we verify statements about supraphysical states and experiences? Sri Aurobindo suggests three different methods, which can be combined. First, we have a power of pure reason, which need not restrict itself to the physical world and physical experiences, or the data provided by scientific instruments; it can operate on a higher plane and conceive or come into touch with supraphysical truths.

But this first method is convincing only to the reasoning mind itself; there are other parts of our being which demand the same sense of reality as that given to us by our senses. Sri Aurobindo points out that we have a faculty that gives us a sense of our individual self, of our own existence. We know when we are hungry; we know when we are angry; we know when we are in love. At present this vivid sense of reality is limited to our egoistic consciousness; but by expanding our sense of self, it is possible to identify ourselves more and more widely with what is around us and on the subtle-physical planes, developing a power of intuition that comes in flashes to give us glimpses of truths that are convincing to our whole being. If we persist in following that path, our experience can widen into true knowledge by identity, which means knowing in the way that we know ourselves.

Thirdly, we can compare the conclusions suggested to us by the operation of our pure reason and by our intuition and personal experience with communications that have come to us from other seekers who have gone before and gained a wider and higher knowledge. Even if we do not have a particular experience ourselves, we

may accept the testimony of those who have, if we have faith in them and believe what they say.

These are the methods of testing statements about supraphysical states and occurrences: by pure reason, by intuition and/or knowledge by identity, and by what we have either experienced ourselves or heard from reliable witnesses. If all these methods of knowledge agree then we can feel sure, at least provisionally, of the reality of these supraphysical truths.

This is the methodology on which *The Life Divine* is based. In it, Sri Aurobindo shows us step by step, with a logic that our reason can accept, the truths that he himself arrived at by intuition and experience, and which he has found confirmed by the testimonies of the ancient rishis that have been transmitted in the Vedas and the Upanishads; to these he has added new aspects revealed by his own experience.

THE UNIVERSAL PLANES OF EXISTENCE

After preparing us in the course of these introductory chapters, Sri Aurobindo proceeds to lead us level by level down the involutionary ladder of manifestation, through the planes of universal existence to mind, life, and finally inconscient matter (wherein consciousness is present but is so deeply involved that it has forgotten itself), the base of the evolutionary process. On the way, he shows us the higher meaning of the term *maya* (i.e., comprehensive and creative knowledge) and introduces us to the state of supermind, the apprehending and comprehending “truth-consciousness,” with its triple poise, lying at the very origin of the universal manifestation.

In Chapters 9 to 25 he guides us through the planes of universal existence, from pure spirit at one extreme to matter at the other, beginning with Chapter 9, “The Pure Existent,” proceeding to its aspect of consciousness and power in Chapter 10, “Conscious Force,” and then to its third aspect of delight. In Chapter 11, “Delight of Existence: The Problem,” he deals with the difficulty we experience when we are told that the omnipresent reality is pure delight of being: we immediately ask “How then can there be so much pain in the world?” In Chapter 12,

“Delight of Existence: The Solution,” he presents his luminous answer.

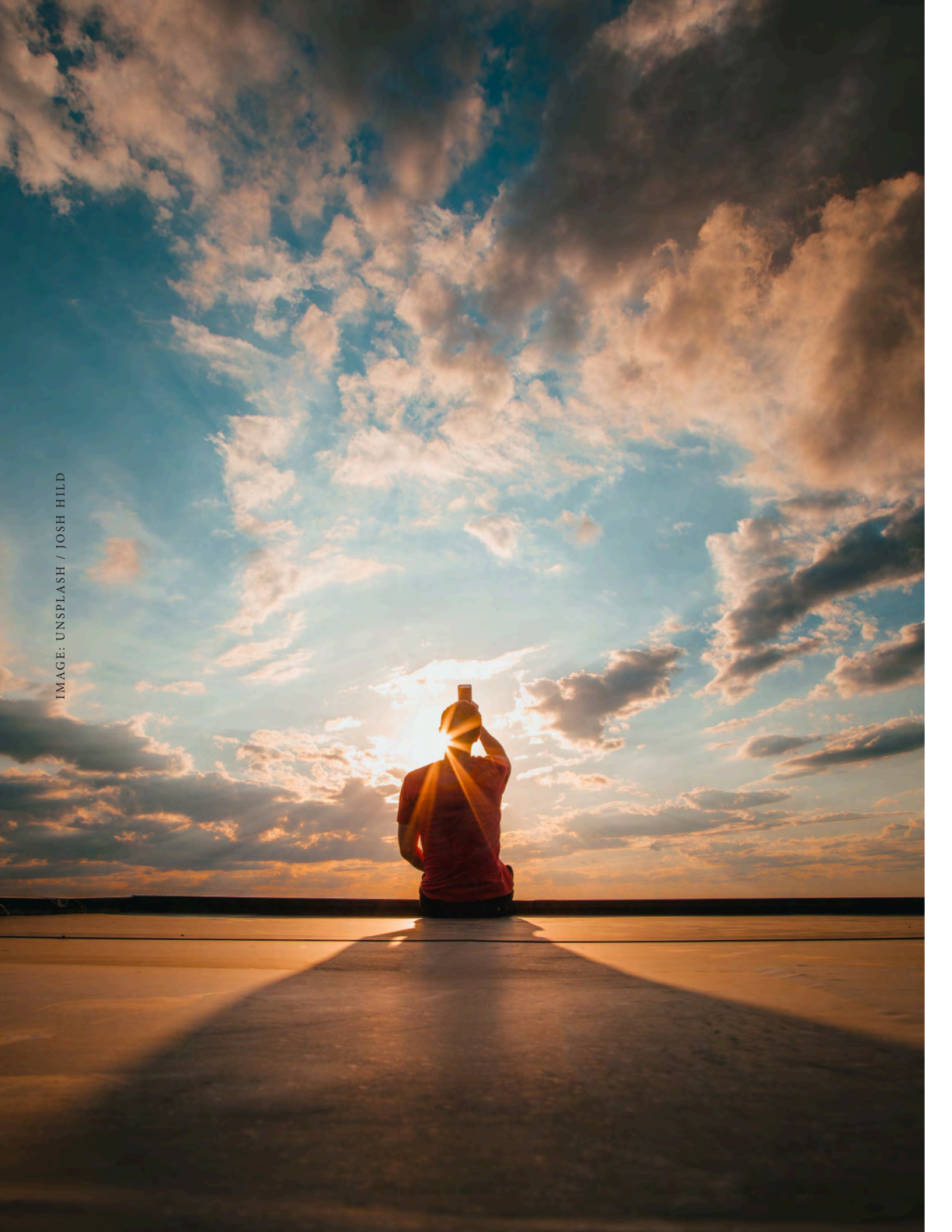
But then, if we admit that the highest formulation we can give for the omnipresent reality underlying this manifestation can be expressed in the Indian term *sachchidananda*—pure existence, consciousness that contains within it force and will, and delight—how does *sachchidananda* manifest itself as this world we experience, which seems to be the very contradiction of pure existence, consciousness, and bliss? How does it happen, and how could it ever have come into existence?

To answer this, Sri Aurobindo leads us step by step through the process of involution. In Chapter 13, “The Divine Maya,” he introduces us to his own term of *supermind*, linking it with what the Vedic rishis referred to as “truth-consciousness,” with two aspects: truth-seeing and truth-hearing. Sri Aurobindo explains that unless some such creative truth-consciousness exists, there seems to be no way that *sachchidananda* could become this world that we experience. He also discusses the word *maya*. *Maya* in later times has come to be understood as illusion, but he explains to us that in fact it is a divine faculty of willed self-limitation. This divine *maya* he equates with supermind, and examines the functions and faculties and possibilities of supermind in the following three chapters.

One of the aspects he speaks about is the origin of individuality. We are aware of ourselves as individuals with a body, life and mind, which provide us a limited capacity for experience, growth, and self-discovery. But individuality does not begin on the mind level. There is a talk of the Mother where she says that our true individuality has an eternal existence as a potentiality within the Supreme, the transcendent. In Chapters 14, 15, and 16 Sri Aurobindo explains the intermediary function of supermind in which three poises of consciousness can be held at the same time: first, the experience of indivisible oneness; then the poise of oneness containing all of its potentialities within it as individual possibilities; and then a status or poise where each of these individual potentialities takes, as it were, its own standpoint, sees things from its own point of view, while not losing awareness of its

How does *sachchidananda* manifest itself as this world we experience, which seems to be the very contradiction of pure existence, consciousness, and bliss?

IMAGE: UNSPLASH / JOSH HILD



The divine individual living in the supermind consciousness would be conscious always of its origin, of its connection with the One, aware that it is an individualised expression of a certain potentiality of the One.

origin, of the One in all, the One in all the individualities, and retaining the sense of the origin, the oneness within themselves. This last state typifies what Sri Aurobindo calls the divine soul, the divine individual.

In Chapter 17, “The Divine Soul,” he examines how an individualized being living in this supermind consciousness would experience a manifestation of the many. It would be very different from the way in which we experience the world around us, because that divine individual would be conscious always of its origin, of its connection with the One, aware that it is an individualized expression of a certain potentiality of the One. It would recognise that the One is present in all the other individualities, that they are equally expressions of the Divine in some individualization of itself, some willed self-limitation. And it would experience the One, the oneness in essence and in relation as well as in its own individuality. This reminds us of a wonderful aphorism of Sri Aurobindo in which he expresses a poetic image of what the perfect fulfillment of our manifestation would be.

And what is the end of the whole matter? As if honey could taste itself and all its drops together and all its drops could taste each other and each the whole honeycomb as itself, so should the end be with God and the soul of man and the universe.⁵

So then, what is the relation between supermind and mind as we experience it? In Chapter 17, “The Divine Soul,” Sri Aurobindo shows us that the individualizing mind is a derivation of supermind, of the truth-consciousness, which has come about by a willed acceptance of forgetfulness of the origin—the acceptance to enter into the state of *avidya*, of ignorance, cut off from awareness of the origin. It is here, towards the end of Chapter 17, that we find our third highlight.

HIGHLIGHT 3: THE ASSENT OF THE SOUL

The divine soul, it seems, is attracted to or agrees to accept the adventure of ignorance. Sri Aurobindo speaks about the attraction of the soul to the adventure into the

unknown. It agrees to forget the oneness, to lose its conscious connection with the origin and enter into the state of *avidya*, of not-knowing, of forgetfulness. At the end of Chapter 17, Sri Aurobindo speaks of the involutionary necessity of this step as:

... the deviation from the Truth and Right of the Spirit, from its oneness, integrality and harmony that was the necessary condition for the great plunge into the Ignorance which is the soul’s adventure in the world and from which was born our suffering and aspiring humanity.⁶

Further on, in Book Two, we found this amazing hint elaborated in two further highlights that we shall come to later. Meanwhile, Sri Aurobindo continued to guide us along the downward path of involution through Chapters 18, “Mind and Supermind”; Chapter 19, “Life”; and three more chapters on the nature of life: Chapter 20, “Death, Desire and Incapacity,” Chapter 21, “The Ascent of Life,” and Chapter 22, “The Problem of Life.” Here we also took a side look at Chapter 16 of *The Human Cycle*: “The Suprarational Ultimate of Life,” which gives a superb expression of Sri Aurobindo’s understanding of the nature and possibilities of the life principle, before we moved on to Chapter 23, “The Double Soul in Man.”

HIGHLIGHT 4: THE DIVINIZATION OF MATTER

The nature of matter is discussed in Chapters 24, “Matter,” 25, “The Knot of Matter,” and 26, “The Ascending Series of Substance.”⁷ Our next “highlight” comes from the end of this chapter:

Our substance does not end with the physical body; that is only the earthly pedestal, the terrestrial base, the material starting-point. As there are behind our waking mentality vaster ranges of consciousness subconscient and superconscient to it of which we become sometimes abnormally aware, so there are behind our gross physical being other and subtler grades of substance with

a finer law and a greater power which support the denser body and which can by our entering into the ranges of consciousness belonging to them be made to impose that law and power on our dense matter and substitute their purer, higher, intenser conditions of being for the grossness and limitation of our present physical life and impulses and habits.

If that be so, then the evolution of a nobler physical existence not limited by the ordinary conditions of animal birth and life and death, of difficult alimentation and facility of disorder and disease and subjection to poor and unsatisfied vital cravings ceases to have the appearance of a dream and chimera and becomes a possibility founded upon a rational and philosophic truth which is in accordance with all the rest that we have hitherto known, experienced or been able to think out about the overt and secret truth of our existence.

The ascent of man from the physical to the supramental must open out the possibility of a corresponding ascent in the grades of substance to that ideal or causal body which is proper to our supramental being, and the conquest of the lower principles by supermind and its liberation of them into a divine life and a divine mentality must also render possible a conquest of our physical limitations by the power and principle of supramental substance. And this means the evolution not only of an untrammelled consciousness, a mind and sense not shut up in the walls of the physical ego or limited to the poor basis of knowledge given by the physical organs of sense, but a life power liberated more and more from its mortal limitations, a physical life fit for a divine inhabitant and,—in the sense not of attachment or of restriction to our present corporeal frame but an exceeding of the law of the physical body,—the conquest of death, an earthly immortality.⁸

Supermind is the divine Gnosis which creates, governs, and upholds the worlds. It upholds both our Knowledge and our Ignorance.

Chapter 27, “The Sevenfold Chord of Being,” draws together what has been explored in the foregoing chapters, bringing us to the basis of knowledge that Sri Aurobindo was aiming to share with us. He has shown us the higher trinity on which universal existence is founded: existence, *sat*; consciousness with its two aspects of *chit-tapas* (consciousness-force); and delight, *ananda*. He has shown us supermind, “the divine Gnosis which creates, governs and upholds the worlds: it is the secret Wisdom which upholds both our Knowledge and our Ignorance.”⁹ He has shown us the lower triplicity of matter, life and mind, which seem to be an expression of the three higher principles acting in subjection to the principle of ignorance, and has explained them as derivations of what he calls “the divine quaternary” or fourfold reality. He has shown our existence to be a sort of reflection of the divine existence, and explained how all these powers are indispensable to cosmic existence, always interdependent and present together, even though one or the other may be more dominant at one time or another, or in one state or another. This fact makes the evolution of the higher principles from the base of matter an inevitability necessity, which must fulfil itself eventually.

THE PLACE AND ROLE OF OVERMIND

While the first 27 chapters of Book One correspond to the 27 chapters of the *Arya* text, which have been thoroughly revised and enlarged, Chapter 28, “Supermind, Mind and the Overmind Maya” was newly written in 1939. In it Sri Aurobindo for the first time in the book introduces the concept of overmind as “an intermediate power and plane of consciousness ... through which the involutionary transition from Mind in the Knowledge to Mind in the Ignorance was effected and through which again the evolutionary reverse transition becomes intelligible and possible.”¹⁰ The following lines are from the closing paragraphs of this chapter, which concludes Book One of *The Life Divine*:

Overmind, Intuition, even Supermind not only must be ... principles inherent and involved in the Inconscience from which we arise in the evolution and inevitably destined to evolve, but are secretly present, occult actively with flashes of intuitive emergence in the cosmic activity of Mind, Life and Matter. It is true that their action is concealed and, even when they emerge, it is modified by the medium, material, vital, mental

Overmind is an intermediate power and plane of consciousness through which the evolutionary transition from mind in the ignorance to mind in the knowledge becomes possible.

in which they work and not easily recognisable.... Yet at every step of the material energy we can see the stamp of inevitability given by a supramental creator, in all the development of life and mind the play of the lines of possibility and their combination which is the stamp of Overmind intervention. As Life and Mind have been released in Matter, so too must in their time these greater powers of the concealed Godhead emerge from the involution and their supreme Light descend into us from above.

A divine Life in the manifestation is then not only possible as the high result and ransom of our present life in the Ignorance but, if these things are as we have seen them, it is the inevitable outcome and consummation of Nature's evolutionary endeavour.¹¹

BOOK TWO: THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE IGNORANCE—THE SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

PART ONE: THE INFINITE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE IGNORANCE

As soon as we started to read the first chapter of Part One of Book Two, we became aware that our journey had confronted us with an immense challenge. All that we had passed through while exploring Book One now seemed like a pleasant afternoon's stroll through a pleasant countryside, compared with the bare Himalayan peaks of metaphysical reasoning to be found in this chapter on "Indeterminates, Cosmic Determinations and the Indeterminable." Even though we took help from M.P.

Pandit's talk on this chapter, which has been published as an appendix to his book on the "legends"¹² referred to earlier, even now in retrospect this chapter appears daunting and impenetrable. That great barrier once passed, the rest of Part One of Book Two still remained challenging. So, as mentioned above, we shall not trace the whole course of Book Two in detail, but share only a few passages that stand out in memory as special highlights.

HIGHLIGHT 5: THE MYSTERY OF THE INCONSCIENT

First, from Chapter 10 of Book Two, Part One, "Knowledge by Identity and Separative Knowledge," we recall, again and again having occasion to refer to it, Sri Aurobindo's revelation of the true nature of the much-misunderstood Inconscience:

The Inconscience is an inverse reproduction of the supreme superconscience: it has the same absoluteness of being and automatic action, but in a vast involved trance; it is Being lost in itself, plunged in its own abyss of infinity. Instead of a luminous absorption in self-existence there is a tenebrous involution in it, the darkness veiled within darkness of the Rig Veda, *tama āsīt tamasā gūḍham*, which makes it look like Non-Existence; instead of a luminous inherent self-awareness there is a consciousness plunged into an abyss of self-oblivion, inherent in being but not awake in being.

Yet is this involved consciousness still a concealed knowledge by identity; it carries in it



Mental man has still to evolve out of himself the fully conscious being, a divine manhood or a spiritual and supramental supermanhood which shall be the next product of the evolution.

the awareness of all the truths of existence hidden in its dark infinite and, when it acts and creates,—but it acts first as Energy and not as Consciousness,—everything is arranged with the precision and perfection of an intrinsic knowledge. In all material things reside a mute and involved Real-Idea, a substantial and self-effective intuition, an eyeless exact perception, an automatic intelligence working out its unexpressed and unthought conceptions,

a blindly seeing sureness of sight, a dumb infallible sureness of suppressed feeling coated in insensibility, which effectuate all that has to be effected. All this state and action of the Inconscient corresponds very evidently with the same state and action of the pure Superconscience, but translated into terms of self-darkness in place of the original self-light.¹³

HIGHLIGHT 6: THE ASSENT OF THE SOUL (2)

Because we, and the world we know, have gradually evolved from this original inconscience, we experience it as a field of clashing dualities, in which limitation, incapacity, ignorance, falsehood, error, suffering, and evil not only exist but often seem to prevail. Even if we accept Sri Aurobindo's view that all this is a divine manifestation, which is being progressively worked out through individuals who are incarnated divine souls, we may wonder why any soul would agree to leave its divine state of blissful perfection and oneness and assent to embodiment in such a world striving and suffering. In Highlight 3, the first hint of an answer to this mystery was glimpsed. In Chapter 14 of Book Two, we read Sri Aurobindo's powerful survey of "The Origin and Remedy of Falsehood, Error, Wrong and Evil;" and in Chapter 4 of Book Two, "The Divine and the Undivine," we found the following enlightening passage:

A manifestation of this kind [which progresses from total unconsciousness through ignorance, division and the war of clashing wills and tendencies] would not seem justifiable if it were imposed on the unwilling creature; but it will be evident that the assent of the embodied spirit must be there already, for Prakriti [Nature-power] cannot act without the assent of the Purusha [the Self as originator, witness, support]. There must have been not only the will of the Divine Purusha to make the cosmic creation possible, but the assent of the individual Purusha to make the individual manifestation possible.



IMAGE: UNSPLASH / ADAM CAO

But it may be said that the reason for the Divine Will and delight in such a difficult and tormented progressive manifestation and the reason for the soul's assent to it is still a mystery. But it is not altogether a mystery if we look at our own nature and can suppose some kindred movement of being in the beginning as its cosmic origin. On the contrary, a play of self-concealing and self-finding is one of the most strenuous joys that conscious being can give to itself, a play of extreme attractiveness. There is no greater pleasure for man himself than a victory which is in its very principle a conquest over difficulties, a victory in knowledge, a victory in power, a victory in creation over the impossibilities of creation, a delight in the conquest over an anguished toil and a hard ordeal of suffering. At the end of separation is the intense joy of union, the joy of a meeting with a self from which we were divided.

There is an attraction in ignorance itself because it provides us with the joy of discovery, the surprise of new and unforeseen creation, a great adventure of the soul; there is a joy of the journey and the search and the finding, a joy of the battle and the crown, the labour and the reward of labour. If delight of existence be the secret of creation, this too is one delight of existence; it can be regarded as the reason or at least one reason of this apparently paradoxical and contrary Lila [play of the divine Being].

But, apart from this choice of the individual Purusha, there is a deeper truth inherent in the original Existence which finds its expression in the plunge into Inconscience; its result is a new affirmation of Sachchidananda in its apparent opposite. If the Infinite's right of various self-manifestation is granted, this too as a possibility of its manifestation is intelligible and has its profound significance.¹⁴

Part Two of Book Two deals with the process and possibilities of the spiritual evolution, which is perhaps

Sri Aurobindo's greatest contribution to the progress of spiritual thought. After preparing us through exploration of several important issues in Chapters 15 to 22, Sri Aurobindo summarizes his view of evolution in several paragraphs at the beginning of Chapter 23, "Man and the Evolution." These form the seventh unforgettable highlight of our reading.

HIGHLIGHT 7: SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION—THE KEYNOTE OF EARTHLY EXISTENCE

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

The obscure mysterious creatrix ends indeed by delivering the secret consciousness out of its thick and tenebrous prison; but she delivers it slowly, little by little, in minute infinitesimal drops, in thin jets, in small vibrant concretions of energy and substance, of life, of mind, as if that were all she could get out through the crass obstacle, the dull reluctant medium of an inconscient stuff of existence.

At first she houses herself in forms of Matter which appear to be altogether unconscious, then struggles towards mentality in the guise of living Matter and attains to it imperfectly in the conscious animal. This consciousness is at first rudimentary, mostly a half subconscious or just conscious instinct; it develops slowly till in more organized forms of living Matter it reaches its climax of

Part Two of Book Two on the process and possibilities of the spiritual evolution is perhaps Sri Aurobindo's greatest contribution to the progress of spiritual thought.

intelligence and exceeds itself in Man, the thinking animal who develops into the reasoning mental being but carries along with him even at his highest elevation the mould of original animality, the dead weight of subconsciousness of body, the downward pull of gravitation towards the original Inertia and Nescience, the control of an inconscient material Nature over his conscious evolution, its power for limitation, its law of difficult development, its immense force for retardation and frustration. This control by the original Inconscience over the consciousness emerging from it takes the general shape of a mentality struggling towards knowledge but itself, in what seems to be its fundamental nature, an Ignorance.

Thus hampered and burdened, mental man has still to evolve out of himself the fully conscious being, a divine manhood or a spiritual and supramental supermanhood which shall be the next product of the evolution. That transition will mark the passage from the evolution in the Ignorance to a greater evolution in the Knowledge, founded and proceeding in the light of the Superconscient and no longer in the darkness of the Ignorance and Inconscience.

This terrestrial evolutionary working of Nature from Matter to Mind and beyond it has a double process: there is an outward visible process of physical evolution with birth as its machinery,—for each evolved form of body housing its own evolved power of consciousness is maintained and kept in continuity by heredity; there is, at the same time, an invisible process of soul evolution with rebirth into ascending grades of form and consciousness as its machinery.

The first by itself would mean only a cosmic evolution; for the individual would be a quickly perishing instrument, and the race, a more abiding collective formulation, would be the real step in the progressive manifestation of the cosmic Inhabitant, the universal Spirit: rebirth is an indispensable condition for any long duration and evolution of the individual being in the earth-existence. Each grade of cosmic manifestation, each type of form that can house the indwelling spirit, is turned by rebirth into a means for the individual soul, the psychic entity, to manifest more and more of its concealed consciousness; each life

becomes a step in a victory over Matter by a greater progression of consciousness in it which shall make eventually Matter itself a means for the full manifestation of the Spirit.¹⁵

Chapter 24 of Book Two, “The Evolution of the Spiritual Man” explores the process of transition from the mental to the spiritual being and how this has happened to individuals in the course of human history. Sri Aurobindo identifies “four main lines which Nature has followed in her attempt to open up the inner being,—religion, occultism, spiritual thought and an inner spiritual realisation and experience,” adding “the three first are approaches, the last is the decisive avenue of entry.”¹⁶ In the course of the chapter he explores the character of each of these approaches and how they can assist different individuals and different parts of the being. He concludes the chapter by pointing out that:

In the evolution of the spiritual man there must necessarily be many stages and in each stage a great variety of individual formations of the being, the consciousness, the life, the temperament, the ideas, the character. The nature of instrumental mind and the necessity of dealing with the life must of itself create an infinite variety according to the stage of development and the individuality of the seeker.

But, apart from that, even the domain of pure spiritual self-realisation and self-expression need not be a single white monotone, there can be a great diversity in the fundamental unity; the supreme Self is one, but the souls of the Self are many and, as is the soul’s formation of nature, so will be its spiritual self-expression. A diversity in oneness is the law of the manifestation; the supramental unification and integration must harmonise these diversities, but to abolish them is not the intention of the Spirit in Nature.¹⁷

Then Sri Aurobindo begins Chapter 25, “The Triple Transformation,” as follows:

If it is the sole intention of Nature in the evolution of the spiritual man to awaken him to the supreme Reality and release him from herself, or from the Ignorance in which she as the Power of the Eternal has masked herself, by a departure

But we have supposed that there is a farther intention—not only a revelation of the Spirit, but a radical and integral transformation of Nature.

into a higher status of being elsewhere, if this step in the evolution is a close and an exit, then in the essence her work has been already accomplished and there is nothing more to be done. The ways have been built, the capacity to follow them has been developed, the goal or last height of the creation is manifest; all that is left is for each soul to reach individually the right stage and turn of its development, enter into the spiritual ways and pass by its own chosen path out of this inferior existence.

But we have supposed that there is a farther intention,—not only a revelation of the Spirit, but a radical and integral transformation of Nature. There is a will in her to effectuate a true manifestation of the embodied life of the Spirit, to complete

what she has begun by a passage from the Ignorance to the Knowledge, to throw off her mask and to reveal herself as the luminous Consciousness-Force carrying in her the eternal Existence and its universal Delight of being....

What the evolutionary Power has done is to make a few individuals aware of their souls, conscious of their selves, aware of the eternal being that they are, to put them into communion with the Divinity or the Reality which is concealed by her appearances: a certain change of nature prepares, accompanies or follows upon this illumination, but it is not the complete and radical change which establishes a secure and settled new principle, a new creation, a permanent new order of being in the field of terrestrial Nature.



The spiritual man has evolved, but not the supramental being who shall thenceforward be the leader of that Nature.

The development of another instrumentation has begun, but has yet to become total and effective; it has besides to cease to be a purely individual self-creation in an original Ignorance, something supernal to earth-life that must always be acquired as an individual achievement by a difficult endeavour. It must become the normal nature of a new type of being; as mind is established here on a basis of Ignorance seeking for Knowledge and growing into Knowledge, so supermind must be established here on a basis of Knowledge growing into its own greater Light....

This can be done only by the triple transformation to which we have already made a passing reference: there must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul-instrumentation; on that or along with that there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of our subconsciousness; last, there must supervene the supramental transmutation,—there must take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature.¹⁸

The psychic realization and transformation, along with the spiritual realization and transformation, are explored in the rest of Chapter 25. “The Ascent Towards Supermind” is the theme of Chapter 26, and “The Gnostic Being” is the title of Chapter 27. Chapter 28, the final peak of the mountain, the culmination of the great pilgrimage is entitled “The Divine Life” and, as we noted earlier, runs to 57 pages. In its final paragraphs, we find the purpose and significance of the manifestation of this universe—which often seems to us so unsatisfactory—revealed in a resounding response to our query about what might induce a divine soul to wish to participate in the adventure of involution and evolution. When we look forward to the as yet unattained culmination of our pilgrimage, we find in the last paragraphs of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo’s crowning affirmation on this topic:



IMAGE: PIXABAY / VICTORIA_ART

HIGHLIGHT 8: THE ASSENT OF THE SOUL (3)

It is for the taste of the Ignorance, its surprise and adventure, one might say, that the soul has descended into the Inconscience and assumed the disguise of Matter, for the adventure and the joy of creation and discovery, an adventure of the Spirit, an adventure of the Mind and Life and the hazardous surprises of their working in Matter, for the discovery and conquest of the new and the unknown; all this constitutes the enterprise of life and all this, it might seem, would cease with the cessation of the Ignorance.

Man's life is made up of the light and the darkness, the gains and losses, the difficulties and dangers, the pleasures and pains of the Ignorance, a play of colors moving on a soil of the general neutrality of Matter which has as its basis the nescience and insensibility of the Inconscient. To the normal life-being an existence without the reactions of success and frustration, vital joy and grief, peril and passion, pleasure and pain, the vicissitudes and uncertainties of fate and struggle and battle and endeavor, a joy of novelty and surprise and creation projecting itself into the unknown, might seem to be void of variety and therefore void of vital savor. Any life surpassing these things tends to appear to it as something featureless and empty or cast in the figure of an immutable sameness; the human mind's picture of heaven is the incessant repetition of an eternal monotone.

But this is a misconception; for an entry into the gnostic consciousness would be an entry into the Infinite. It would be a self-creation bringing out the Infinite infinitely into form of being, and the interest of the Infinite is much greater and multitudinous as well as more imperishably delightful than the interest of the finite. The evolution in the Knowledge would be a more beautiful and glorious manifestation with more vistas ever unfolding themselves and more intensive in all ways than any evolution could be in the Ignorance. The delight of the Spirit is ever new, the forms of beauty it takes innumerable, its godhead ever young and the taste of delight, *rasa*,

of the Infinite eternal and inexhaustible. The gnostic manifestation of life would be more full and fruitful and its interest more vivid than the creative interest of the Ignorance; it would be a greater and happier constant miracle....

Our evolution in the Ignorance with its chequered joy and pain of self-discovery and world discovery, its half fulfilments, its constant finding and missing, is only our first state. It must lead inevitably towards an evolution in the Knowledge, a self-finding and self-unfolding of the Spirit, a self-revelation of the Divinity in things in that true power of itself in Nature which is to us still a Supernature.¹⁹

NOTES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), vols. 21–22, p. 48.
2. M.P. Pandit, *Legends in The Life Divine*, 1985, reprinted 1994, Dipti Publications, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, vols. 21–22, pp. 4, 7.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, vols. 21–22, pp. 64–65. I have taken the liberty of separating these seven sentences, which together form a comprehensive statement of the essential basis of the view that Sri Aurobindo develops through the rest of his magnum opus.
5. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, vol. 13, p. 204.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, vols. 21–22, p. 169.
7. See also Sri Aurobindo's "argument" to this chapter in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, vol. 13, p. 485.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, vols. 21–22, pp. 274–275.
9. *Ibid.* p. 277.
10. *Ibid.* p. 287.
11. *Ibid.* pp. 303–304.
12. M.P. Pandit, *Legends in The Life Divine*.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, vols. 21–22, p. 570.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 426–27.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 856–58.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 892.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 921.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 922–24.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 1106–07.

SHRADDHAVAN was a writer, educator, translator, and editor. She founded Savitri Bhavan in Auroville. She left her body on July 19, 2022, in Auroville.



Imprint OF A Deathless Sun

The Effect of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga

MARGARET ASTRID PHANES

FOR MANY YEARS, I PRACTICED AGNI YOGA. ITS discipline was a light-fire meditation that brought a descent of higher force from an overhead center; its emphasis was on the illumination and transformation of consciousness. In hindsight, it provided a framework for understanding and practicing Integral Yoga.

I was teaching this light-fire meditation when I came to the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I had previously read a compilation of their writings on *Sleep and Dreams*, a small book that focused on applied yoga; but since everything that they wrote opens one up to a spiritual force, an inner connection was made. Years after that first exposure, I was invited to attend a contemplation-and-practice study group that centered on their works. That lasted for ten years.

Integral Yoga introduced me to the psychic being (the inmost soul) and its ability to transform the nature and replace the ego as the center of one's being. This had an immense impact on my sadhana. It brought together the descent of conscious-force with Agni, the fire of the psychic being. It also emphasized surrender to the Divine Mother and her emanations: knowledge, power, harmony, and perfection. This brought access to these divine forces as helpers and agents in my life.

Even my first readings of Integral Yoga inspired my artwork. When Sri Aurobindo stated that vision could be closer to truth than thinking, something in me responded. It confirmed inner experiences that I wanted to express. His writings, and especially his poems, are full of mantric

power. I once attended a *Savitri* reading where a line was recited containing the words *a deathless sun*. "I have waited all my life to hear about a deathless sun!" I said. For me the deathless sun can be many things, including the supermind. There are so many ways to be imprinted by the Divine; this was, for me, one instance.

One way that I measure the impact of Sri Aurobindo's vision and teachings is to compare artwork that I created before my introduction to Integral Yoga with work that was inspired afterwards. My early digital photo collages illustrated mythic and symbolic images. A dominant theme was the heroine's journey transformed by life-force energy. As my sadhana progressed, my artwork changed from the mythical and symbolic to states of consciousness transformed through color, shape, light, and transparency. Sun, circles, and light took on forms of the Divine, Agni, shakti, the supramental, the soul, and purification through the descent of conscious-force, the radiance of soul union, and the merging with the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo speaks about three transformations: the psychic, the spiritual, and the supramental. I came to Integral Yoga with some experience of spiritual transformation. With the guidance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, I opened to the radiance of the psychic transformation. I aspire to and am inspired by supramental transformation and the opportunity to cooperate with the supramental action in the world. Through *purna yoga* (a full or complete yoga), all three transformations provide a sadhana for dynamic progress. All three offer endless waves of truth, love, and conscious-force.



As purna yoga, Integral Yoga is a yoga of knowledge, devotion, works, and perfection. No matter which approach I have concentrated on, the outcome has always been unity, peace, and faith. I am grateful to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for their ongoing and immeasurable help.

Sri Aurobindo's writings express a vast vision of the individual, the universal, and the transcendent. Central to this vision is the realization of the individual soul and its evolution. But it is an interconnected vision in which we are also asked to participate in a collective yoga of transformation for the evolution of humanity. We face multiple crises and need these methods of yogic consciousness to clear a path and help shape a new synthesis. For this, bringing the Divine into our earthly life is essential.

An Integral Yoga practice allows me to fully participate in these new unfoldments. I am eternally inspired to create by all that is hidden and all that is revealed.

She came out where there shone a deathless sun.
A house was there all made of flame and light
And crossing a wall of doorless living fire
There suddenly she met her secret soul.

—*Savitri, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*,
vol. 34, pp. 525–526

MARGARET ASTRID PHANES composes illuminating visuals, teaches light-force meditation, and is a former board member of the Sri Aurobindo Association.

In Search of Joy

ISA WAGNER

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS LIFE, SO FULL OF suffering, for humanity? Why is there this endless struggle and the helplessness, the hopelessness, the powerlessness? Why the agony and the despair? Why all the differences between the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, the intelligent and the less intelligent? What is the point of it all? Why are we here? What happens when we are dead and the body no longer exists—what happens then? Life here, surely that can't be all?

From early childhood, I was preoccupied with these questions and searched for answers. How could the world be changed and become a better place? This endless pain and torment—it all has to come to an end one day! Where in this world is the joy, which is also part of creation, and the peace and silence? What does one have to do to bring joy into the world? Where is the key?

This search led me through all the “isms” (Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, occultism ...), and to Theosophy, to the Freemasons and other spiritual groups, including various initiations deep into the innermost levels of consciousness and the highest heights. But finding bliss for oneself does not change the world, does not free humanity from suffering, and life in matter remains tough, impenetrable, and unchangeable.

The answer came through the encounter with Sri Aurobindo in 1994 when he finally revealed himself to me. Satprem's book, *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*, fell into my hands, and when I opened it, the words I read were like finding and recognizing what I had been searching for all along. I felt intimately connected with Sri Aurobindo, as if I had known him for ages, and a great feeling of happiness flowed through my whole body. I began to realize that he had brought humanity the key to a new life on earth. Transformation through the change of consciousness in matter was made possible by a power that had not previously been present in earth consciousness—he called it the supramental, the truth consciousness, which will have the power to transform the physical world.

Through my deep connection with Sri Aurobindo, further development accelerated. He took me firmly by the hand, guided and straightened me up when I was about to sink and thought I was drowning in pain and agony.

Sri Aurobindo gives me courage and strength, refuge and shelter. He is my friend, my companion by day and by night; he is my hero, my defender, who guards and protects me. He is my rock in the surf, my lighthouse in the night. He has transformed my being, given me peace and bliss, and brought sweetness and joy into my life.

I GIVE YOU IT ALL

I give You my heart and I give You my soul,
I give You my love and I give You my goal,
I give You my joy, I give You my life,
I give You the aim for which I strive.

And I give You my hopes and I give You my dreams,
I give You my thoughts and all my beliefs,
And all that I feel and all that I know,
I give You it all!

Whatever Your will, I'm happy to do,
Whatever You ask, I give it to You,
I give You my heart and I give You my soul,
My body and all!

IMAGE: PIXABAY / KELLEPICS



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Supermind and

Editor's note: The Sri Aurobindo Ashram's *Bulletin of Physical Education* first published "Supermind and the Life Divine" in 1949 as part of a series of essays that were later published under the title "The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth" in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, volume 13 of the *Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*.

In his later years Sri Aurobindo wrote little other than these essays, which he produced upon request by the Mother, and some revisions of his epic poem *Savitri*, as he was primarily preoccupied with bringing down the supramental consciousness-force into the physical plane. These essays succinctly describe the connection between his spiritual philosophy and practice of yoga.

In this essay, Sri Aurobindo relates the metaphysical outlook laid out in his magnum opus, *The Life Divine*, to the supermind, which is the key to individual and collective transformation of consciousness. He writes that the ideal goal of establishing a divine life on earth necessitates a fundamental spiritual transformation of our nature. This radical change is only possible if we can go beyond the present

evolutionary stage, rooted in ignorance and dominated by mental consciousness, to what he calls supramental consciousness, which is in its very essence a truth-consciousness, where everything is truly one but without losing the sense of multiplicity. Once the truth-consciousness is established, the evolution of consciousness will continue firmly toward divine delight, knowledge, and power.

The Divine is already within us, involved and concealed in our inmost reality, and it is this reality that we must manifest and thus become conscious participants in our evolution. To achieve the goal of Integral Yoga it is not necessary to escape from life to realize divine consciousness. The supermind will bring with it the realization of the Divine in self and in nature and all the possibilities of the divine life on earth. Even the body will become more conscious and contribute to the transformation of the physical being. Sri Aurobindo points out that there will be obstacles along the way, especially those offered by the "nature of the earth-order." But the possibility is also there for the greater evolutionary destiny of humanity.—Bahman A.K. Shirazi



the Life Divine

SRI AUROBINDO

A DIVINE LIFE UPON EARTH, THE IDEAL WE HAVE PLACED before us, can only come about by a spiritual change of our being and a radical and fundamental change, an evolution or revolution of our nature. The embodied being upon earth would have to rise out of the domination over it of its veils of mind, life and body into the full consciousness and possession of its spiritual reality, and its nature also would have to be lifted out of the consciousness and power of consciousness proper to a mental, vital and physical being into the greater consciousness and greater power of being and the larger and freer life of the spirit. It would not lose these former veils but they would no longer be veils or imperfect expressions but true manifestations; they would be changed into states of light, powers of spiritual life, vehicles of a spiritual existence. But this again could not be if mind, life and body were not taken up and transformed by a state of being and a force of being superior to them, a power of Supermind as much above our incomplete mental nature as that is above the nature of animal life and animated Matter, as it is immeasurably above the mere material nature.

The Supermind is in its very essence a truth-consciousness, a consciousness always free from the Ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence and from which nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and world-knowledge and a right consciousness and the right use of our existence in the universe. The Supermind, because it is a truth-consciousness, has this knowledge inherent in it and this power of true existence; its course is straight and can go direct to its aim, its field is wide and can even be made illimitable. This is because its very nature is knowledge: it has not to acquire knowledge but possesses

On its summits the supermind possesses the divine omniscience and omnipotence ... it starts from truth and light and moves always in truth and light.

it in its own right; its steps are not from nescience or ignorance into some imperfect light, but from truth to greater truth, from right perception to deeper perception, from intuition to intuition, from illumination to utter and boundless luminousness, from growing widenesses to the utter vasts and to very infinitude. On its summits it possesses the divine omniscience and omnipotence, but even in an evolutionary movement of its own graded self-manifestation by which it would eventually reveal its own highest heights, it must be in its very nature essentially free from ignorance and error: it starts from truth and light and moves always in truth and light.

As its knowledge is always true, so too its will is always true; it does not fumble in its handling of things or stumble in its paces. In the Supermind feeling and emotion do not depart from their truth, make no slips or mistakes, do not swerve from the right and the real, cannot misuse beauty and delight or twist away from a divine rectitude. In the Supermind sense cannot mislead or deviate into the grossnesses which are here its natural imperfections and the cause of reproach, distrust and misuse by our ignorance. Even an incomplete statement made by the Supermind is a truth leading to a further truth, its incomplete action a step towards completeness. All the life and action and leading of the Supermind is guarded in its very nature from the falsehoods and uncertainties that are our lot; it moves in safety towards its perfection. Once the truth-consciousness was established here on its own sure foundation, the evolution of divine life would be a progress in felicity, a march through light to Ananda.

Supermind is an eternal reality of the divine Being and the divine Nature. In its own plane it already and always exists and possesses its own essential law of being; it has not to be created or to emerge or evolve into existence out of involution in Matter or out of non-existence, as it might seem to the view of mind which itself seems to its own view to have so emerged from life and Matter or to have evolved out of an involution in life and Matter. The nature of Supermind is always the same, a being of knowledge, proceeding from truth to truth, creating or

rather manifesting what has to be manifested by the power of a pre-existent knowledge, not by hazard but by a self-existent destiny in the being itself, a necessity of the thing in itself and therefore inevitable. Its manifestation of the divine life will also be inevitable; its own life on its own plane is divine and, if Supermind descends upon the earth, it will bring necessarily the divine life with it and establish it here.

Supermind is the grade of existence beyond mind, life and Matter and, as mind, life and Matter have manifested on the earth, so too must Supermind in the inevitable course of things manifest in this world of Matter. In fact, a supermind is already here but it is involved, concealed behind this manifest mind, life and Matter and not yet acting overtly or in its own power: if it acts, it is through these inferior powers and modified by their characters and so not yet recognisable. It is only by the approach and arrival of the descending Supermind that it can be liberated upon earth and reveal itself in the action of our material, vital and mental parts so that these lower powers can become portions of a total divinised activity of our whole being: it is that that will bring to us a completely realised divinity or the divine life. It is indeed so that life and mind involved in Matter have realised themselves here; for only what is involved can evolve, otherwise there could be no emergence.

The manifestation of a supramental truth-consciousness is therefore the capital reality that will make the divine life possible. It is when all the movements of thought, impulse and action are governed and directed by a self-existent and luminously automatic truth-consciousness and our whole nature comes to be constituted by it and made of its stuff that the life divine will be complete and absolute. Even as it is, in reality though not in the appearance of things, it is a secret self-existent knowledge and truth that is working to manifest itself in the creation here. The Divine is already there immanent within us, ourselves are that in our inmost reality and it is this reality that we have to manifest; it is that which constitutes the urge towards the divine living and makes necessary the

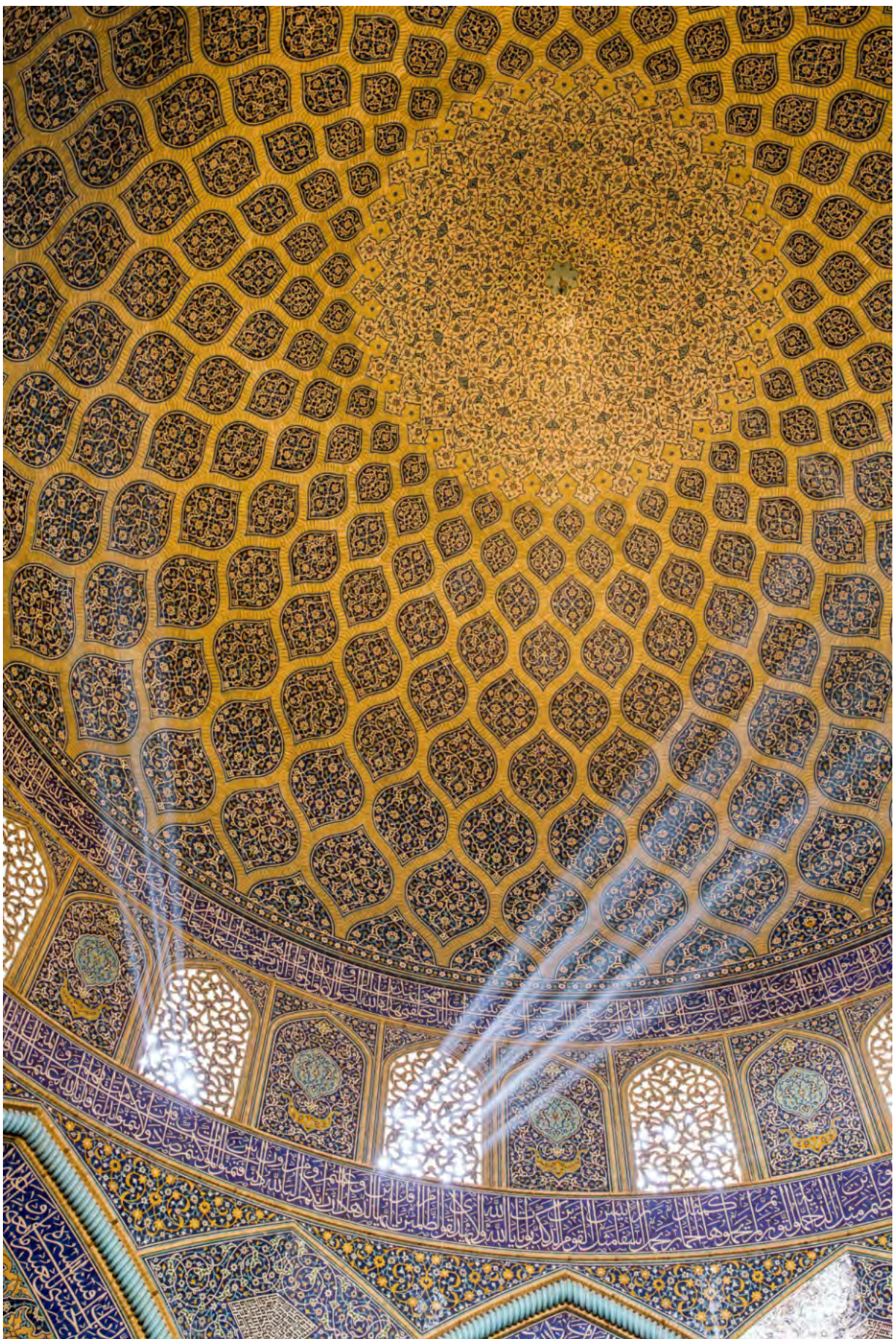


IMAGE: UNSPLASH / FARDAD SEPANDAR



creation of the life divine even in this material existence.

A manifestation of the Supermind and its truth-consciousness is then inevitable; it must happen in this world sooner or later. But it has two aspects, a descent from above, an ascent from below, a self-revelation of the Spirit, an evolution in Nature. The ascent is necessarily an effort, a working of Nature, an urge or *nisus* on her side to raise her lower parts by an evolutionary or revolutionary change, conversion or transformation into the divine reality and it may happen by a process and progress or by a rapid miracle. The descent or self-revelation of the Spirit is an act of the supreme Reality from above which makes the realisation possible and it can appear either as the divine aid which brings about the fulfilment of the progress and process or as the sanction of the miracle. Evolution, as we see it in this world, is a slow and difficult process and, indeed, needs usually ages to reach abiding results; but this is because it is in its nature an emergence from inconscient beginnings, a start from nescience and a

working in the ignorance of natural beings by what seems to be an unconscious force.

There can be, on the contrary, an evolution in the light and no longer in the darkness, in which the evolving being is a conscious participant and cooperator, and this is precisely what must take place here. Even in the effort and progress from the Ignorance to Knowledge this must be in part if not wholly the endeavour to be made on the heights of the nature, and it must be wholly that in the final movement towards the spiritual change, realisation, transformation. It must be still more so when there is a transition across the dividing line between the Ignorance and the Knowledge and the evolution is from knowledge to greater knowledge, from consciousness to greater consciousness, from being to greater being. There is then no longer any necessity for the slow pace of the ordinary evolution; there can be rapid conversion, quick transformation after transformation, what would seem to our normal present mind a succession of miracles. An evolution on

An awakening must come in the earth-nature and in the earth-consciousness which will be at least the effective preparation and the first steps of its evolution towards a new world order.

A manifestation of the supermind has two aspects, a descent from above, an ascent from below, a self-revelation of the Spirit, an evolution in Nature.

the supramental levels could well be of that nature; it could be equally, if the being so chose, a more leisurely passage of one supramental state or condition of things to something beyond but still supramental, from level to divine level, a building up of divine gradations, a free growth to the supreme Supermind or beyond it to yet undreamed levels of being, consciousness and Ananda.

The supramental knowledge, the truth-consciousness of the Supermind is in itself one and total: even when there is a voluntary limitation of the knowledge or what might seem to be a partial manifestation, it is so voluntarily; the limitation does not proceed from or result in any kind of ignorance, it is not a denial or withholding of knowledge, for all the rest of the truth that is not brought into expression is implicit there. Above all, there are no contradictions: whatever would seem to be opposites to the mind, here carry in themselves their own right relation and reconciling agreement,—if indeed any reconciliation were needed, for the harmony of these apparent opposites is complete. The mind tends to put the personal and the impersonal

in face of each other as if they were two contraries, but the Supermind sees and realises them as, at the lowest, complements and mutually fulfilling powers of the single Reality and, more characteristically, as interfused and inseparable and themselves that single Reality. The Person has his aspect of impersonality inseparable from himself without which he could not be what he is or could not be his whole self: the Impersonal is in its truth not a state of existence, a state of consciousness and a state of bliss, but a Being self-existent, conscious of self, full of his own self-existent bliss, bliss the very substance of his being,—so, the one single and illimitable Person, Purusha.

In the Supermind the finite does not cut up or limit the infinite, does not feel itself contrary to the infinite; but rather it feels its own infinity: the relative and temporal is not a contradiction of eternity but a right relation of its aspects, a native working or an imperishable feature of the eternal. Time there is only the eternal in extension and the eternal can be felt in the momentary. Thus the integral Divine is there in the Supermind and no theory



of illusion or self-contradictory Maya need be thrust in to justify its way of existence. It will be obvious that an escape from life is not necessary for the Divine to find itself or its reality; it possesses that always whether in cosmic life or in its transcendent existence. The divine life cannot be a contradiction of the Divine or of the supreme reality; it is part of that reality, an aspect or expression of it and it can be nothing else. In life on the supramental plane all the Divine is possessed, and when the Supermind descends on earth, it must bring the Divine with it and make that full possession possible here.

The divine life will give to those who enter into it and possess it an increasing and finally a complete possession of the truth-consciousness and all that it carries in it; it will bring with it the realisation of the Divine in self and the Divine in Nature. All that is sought by the God-seeker will be fulfilled in his spirit and in his life as he moves towards spiritual perfection. He will become aware of the transcendent reality, possess in the self-experience the supreme existence, consciousness, bliss, be one with Sachchidananda. He will become one with cosmic being and universal Nature: he will contain the world in himself, in his own cosmic consciousness and feel himself one with all beings; he will see himself in all and all in himself, become united and identified with the Self which has become all existences. He will perceive the beauty of the All-Beautiful and the miracle of the All-Wonderful; he will enter in the end into the bliss of the Brahman and live abidingly in it and for all this he will not need to shun existence or plunge into the annihilation of the spiritual Person in some self-extinguishing Nirvana. As in the Self, so in Nature, he can realise the Divine. The nature of the Divine is Light and Power and Bliss; he can feel the divine Light and Power and Bliss above him and descending into him, filling every strand of his nature, every cell and atom of his being, flooding his soul and mind and life and body, surrounding him like an illimitable sea and filling the world, suffusing all his feeling and sense and experience, making all his life truly and utterly divine.

This and all else that the spiritual consciousness can bring to him the divine life will give him when it reaches its utmost completeness and perfection and the supramental truth-consciousness is fulfilled in all himself; but even before that he can attain to something of it all, grow in it, live in it, once the Supermind has descended upon him and has the direction of his existence. All relations with the Divine will be his: the trinity of God-knowledge,

divine works and devotion to God will open within him and move towards an utter self-giving and surrender of his whole being and nature. He will live in God and with God, possess God, as it is said, even plunge in him forgetting all separate personality, but not losing it in self-extinction. The love of God and all the sweetness of love will remain his, the bliss of contact as well as the bliss of oneness and the bliss of difference in oneness. All the infinite ranges of experience of the Infinite will be his and all the joy of the finite in the embrace of the Infinite.

The descent of the Supermind will bring to one who receives it and is fulfilled in the truth-consciousness all the possibilities of the divine life. It will take up not only the whole characteristic experience which we recognise already as constituting the spiritual life, but also all which we now exclude from that category but which is capable of divinisation, not excluding whatever of the earth-nature and the earth-life can be transformed by the touch of the Supermind and taken up into the manifested life of the Spirit. For a divine life on earth need not be a thing apart and exclusive having nothing to do with the common earthly existence: it will take up human being and human life, transform what can be transformed, spiritualise whatever can be spiritualised, cast its influence on the rest and effectuate either a radical or an uplifting change, bring about a deeper communion between the universal and the individual, invade the ideal with the spiritual truth of which it is a luminous shadow and help to uplift into or towards a greater and higher existence.

Mind it will uplift towards a diviner light of thought and will, life towards deeper and truer emotion and action, towards a larger power of itself, towards high aims and motives. Whatever cannot yet be raised into its own full truth of being, it will bring nearer to that fullness; whatever is not ready even for that change, will still see the possibility open to it whenever its still incomplete evolution has made it ready for self-fulfilment. Even the body, if it can bear the touch of Supermind, will become more aware of its own truth,—for there is a body consciousness that has its own instinctive truth and power of right condition and action, even a kind of unexpressed occult knowledge in the constitution of its cells and tissues which may one day become conscious and contribute to the transformation of the physical being. An awakening must come in the earth-nature and in the earth-consciousness which will be, if not the actual beginning, at least the effective preparation and the first steps of its evolution towards a new and diviner world order.

There is a body consciousness that has a kind of unexpressed occult knowledge in its cells and tissues which may one day become conscious and contribute to the transformation of the physical being.

This would be the fulfilment of the divine life which the descent of Supermind and the working of the truth-consciousness taking hold of the whole nature of the living being would bring about in all who could open themselves to its power or influence. Even its first immediate effect would be on all who are capable the possibility of entering into the truth-consciousness and changing all the movements of the nature more and more into the movements of the supramental truth, truth of thought, truth of will, truth in the feelings, truth in the acts, true conditions of the whole being even to the body, eventually transformation, a divinising change. For those who could so open themselves and remain open, there would be no limitation to this development and even no fundamental difficulty; for all difficulties would be dissolved by the pressure of the supramental light and power from above pouring itself into the mind and the life-force and the body.

But the result of the supramental descent need not be limited to those who could thus open themselves entirely and it need not be limited to the supramental change; there could also be a minor or secondary transformation of the mental being within a freed and perfected scope of the mental nature. In place of the human mind as it now is, a mind limited, imperfect, open at every moment to all kinds of deviation from the truth or missing of the truth, all kinds of error and openness even to the persuasions of a complete falsehood and perversion of the nature, a mind blinded and pulled down towards inconscience and ignorance, hardly arriving at knowledge, an intellect prone to interpret the higher knowledge in abstractions and indirect figures seizing and holding even the messages of the higher intuition with an uncertain and disputed grasp, there could emerge a true mind liberated and capable of the free and utmost perfection of itself and its instruments, a life governed by the free and illumined mind, a body responsive to the light and able to carry out all that the free mind and will could demand of it. This change might happen not only in the few, but extend and generalise itself in the race.

This possibility, if fulfilled, would mean that the human

dream of perfection, perfection of itself, of its purified and enlightened nature, of all its ways of action and living, would be no longer a dream but a truth that could be made real and humanity lifted out of the hold on it of inconscience and ignorance. The life of the mental being could be harmonised with the life of the Supermind which will then be the highest order above it, and become even an extension and annexe of the truth-consciousness, a part and province of the divine life. It is obvious that if the Supermind is there and an order of supramental being is established as the leading principle in earth-nature, as mind is now the leading principle, but with a sureness, a complete government of the earthly existence, a capacity of transformation of all upon their level and within their natural boundaries of which the mind in its imperfection was not capable, an immense change of human life, even if it did not extend to transformation, would be inevitable.

It remains to consider what might be the obstacles in the way of this possibility, especially those offered by the nature of the earth-order and its function as a field of a graded evolution in which our humanity is a stage and, it might be argued, its very imperfection an evolutionary necessity, how far could or would Supermind by its presence and government of things overcome this difficulty while respecting the principle of gradation, and whether it could not rectify the wrong and ignorant order imposed by the Ignorance and Inconscience and substitute for it a right gradation in which the perfection and divinisation would be possible. Certainly, the way for the individual would be open; whatever group of human beings aspire as united in an endeavour at a perfect individual and collective living or aspire to the divine life, would be assisted towards the attainment of its aspiration: that at least the Supermind would make its minimum consequence. But the greater possibility is also there and might even be offered to the whole of humanity.

This, then, we have to consider, what would the descent of the Supermind mean for mankind and what would be its result or its promise for the whole life and evolutionary future and destiny of the human race?



GROWING WITHIN TO CHANGE THE WORLD:

Being Raised on the Integral Yoga

MUNA WAGNER

SRI AUROBINDO CAME INTO MY LIFE WHEN I HAD JUST turned 12. I was living with my family in Moscow, Russia, where we had moved two years prior from Germany. My mother has always been a spiritual seeker, and in her search came across many different teachings. One day, thinking it was time for her daughter to start the spiritual journey, my mom looked in her bookshelf to find the right reading material to send me on my path. As she browsed her books, she came across one she had never read: *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*, by Satprem. She opened it and began reading—and the rest is history, so to speak. She became a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and Integral Yoga. She didn't introduce me to the yoga directly, but I think that was the time when Sri Aurobindo's teachings became part of my upbringing.

From early on, I had an inquisitive nature and would ask questions about life, death, and everything in between. The insights I got from Sri Aurobindo through my mother always felt right—I might not have liked them, but there was a truth to them that I couldn't deny. For instance, I was prone to nightmares as a child and well into my adult years. I still remember how my mom explained to me the different vital planes and how we are exposed to them at night. She told me I needed to become conscious of

my sleep and ask for protection, so that I could stop myself from being pulled into bad dreams and instead wake up and free myself from the grip of negative energies. Through Integral Yoga I received a practical tool kit that made me feel safer at night. Mind you, I still get nightmares occasionally, but now I know what to do.

During my adolescence we used to have philosophical discussions at dinner: What's the purpose of life? What happens when we die? Do we have a soul, and if so, how does it all work? For any question I had, I could always find an answer in Sri Aurobindo's teachings.

For a long time during my 20s I suffered from depression. I looked for comfort and insights in Western psychology, but was told that you can never be fully cured from depression. I found solace in the explanations of Sri Aurobindo. His powerful wisdom, which my whole being and every cell of my body absorbed like a sponge, was a lifesaver. I began to understand how depression works, how forces get ahold of people, and most importantly, how not to identify with the immense state of sadness. For me one of the most important teachings is that things can and will and must always get better. It may take time and we may struggle, but we are never stuck. I am deeply grateful for the realization Integral Yoga gave me, and continues to offer.

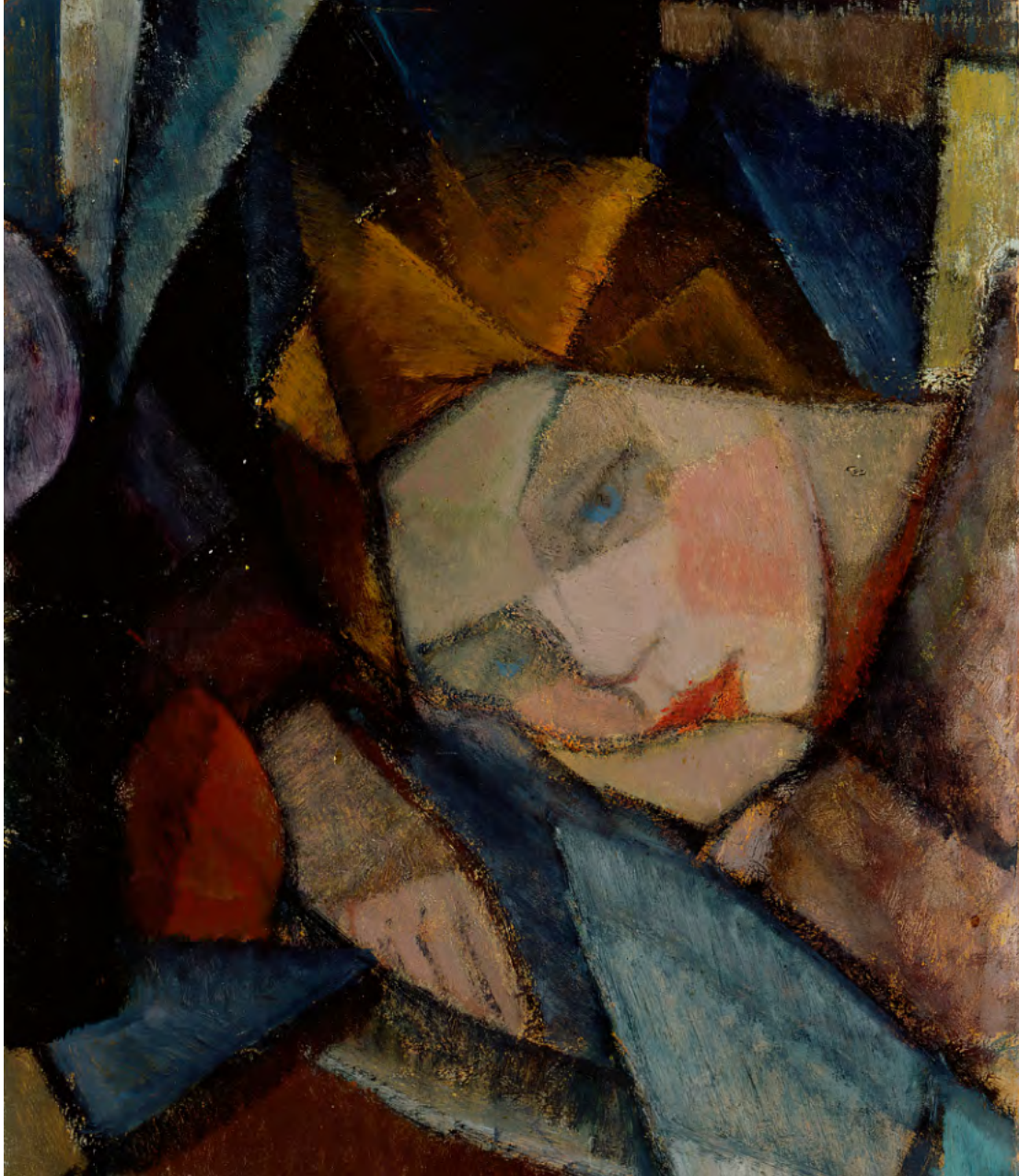


IMAGE: ARTVEE / ALVAR CAWÉN

But besides these insights into human nature and how to transform it, I started to get intrigued by the societal dimensions of Sri Aurobindo's writings. I still recall reading *The Ideal of Human Unity* for the first time and feeling a deep state of happiness and comfort that indeed, the world will change. This book looks at human evolution, the development of society and the world at large, and why certain eras came and had to go. It offers an outlook on what is to come next. I always felt that the current state we are living in can't be all there is. In Sri Aurobindo's writings I found perspective on the future of humanity.

Sri Aurobindo provides insight to help me understand myself better and become aware of the different elements and planes of being. He gives me guidance in my own journey on this planet and connects me to something

larger than life: the Divine within. At the same time his yoga places the individual being, the personal journey, in context with the collective evolution of humanity. When I struggle with a certain aspect of the world, I receive insights into what aspect of myself is struggling inside. This helps me to become more and more my true self, and in turn give to the world what I have to give. For me Sri Aurobindo and Integral Yoga are keys to progress, to understanding and changing myself, and thereby to contributing to a change of consciousness in the world. I couldn't ask for more.

MUNA WAGNER is a trainer and facilitator specializing in communication, leadership, self-development, and the balance between personal growth and collective progress.

A Loving Tribute to Sri Aurobindo Ghose

ELLEMA ALBERT-NEAL

I AM HARDLY A STRANGER TO SPIRITUAL, EXTRASENSORY, and paranormal phenomena. I have had my share of extraordinary, inspiring, and insightful other-worldly encounters beginning at birth. My grandmother showed me the power of faith, and a few years after she passed, I had an out-of-body dream. I entered *into the spirit* to accompany my grandfather through a vast expanse as he transitioned beyond the space-time continuum. He easily passed through an energetic membrane that I could not penetrate unless first, “I must evolve.” As a result, my own evolution became of prime importance to me. I believe my grandparents paved the way for me to have relationships that transcend generational and physical boundaries.

Twenty years later, I longed to be *in the spirit* again. I had given up hope that it could reoccur on its own. Determined, I dedicated myself to daily spiritual practice, intent upon feeling a divine touch once more.

One day when I was meditating, I felt a tap on my head. My consciousness widened like expanding ripples in a body of water when a pebble falls into it. The Indian national hero and sage Sri Aurobindo Ghose entered my consciousness. I did not know who he was at first, but later identified him on the internet. I asked a coworker from India and discovered that Sri Aurobindo’s life works furthered an advanced theory and practice for conscious evolution. I committed years to academic study to develop and apply doctoral-level research to my ideas on leadership,

spiritual pragmatism, and self-actualization as a conscious evolution strategy for myself, and eventually for others.

Before long, Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa, the Mother, became prominent figures in my lived experience. Somehow, Sri Aurobindo understood my need for a message of truth for the times. He encouraged me to allow the continuous extension of life across all boundaries of past, present, and future so that a guru need not be physically present with me.

Nearly every aspect of my being has changed since the day Sri Aurobindo made himself known. He came quietly as the wind through willows; a chiming in the distance or a leaf falling softly upon a pool of still water. Suddenly, I am awake, newly poised, and ready. My mind opens, clicks, and engages. He invites me into a sacred space of wonder and awe. He listens to the longing of the soul. His words provoke mine and amplify my spiritual vibration. His writing takes me to a different place, where I am inspired, creative, thinking deeply, and smiling from within.

It should come as no surprise that Sri Aurobindo’s influence upon my spiritual practice and academic research brought me to Auroville, New Delhi, Greater Noida (a planned city located in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh), and Pondicherry. Since the morning he entered my consciousness in February 2010, he has been an active participant in my life. His and the Mother’s accomplishments inspired me to begin a new era for myself, finish my education, and earn my doctoral degree. My doctoral

praxis and subsequently published works are replete with the evolutionary consciousness of Integral Yoga. I am humbled and grateful that my path has brought me to a place where I am commemorating the 150th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's birth.

Please join me in celebration of his audaciously grand proposal that biological evolution is an outward sign of spiritual growth. For him, we are the love story of the universe. We are of the instant the intense forces of matter, life, and consciousness exploded under pressure and released a new form of existence—the human being, the

living embodiment of a mental consciousness vibrating in the atomic matter. As we continue this evolutionary imperative to become something more than a mental being with a highly evolved spiritual personality, may we grow in Sri Aurobindo's vision of spirit that emerges as the Godhead, illuminating into a true consciousness beyond duality to possess the cosmic bliss.

ELLEMA ALBERT NEAL, Ph.D., is a science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) professional and an author in the sociocultural spiritual genre.

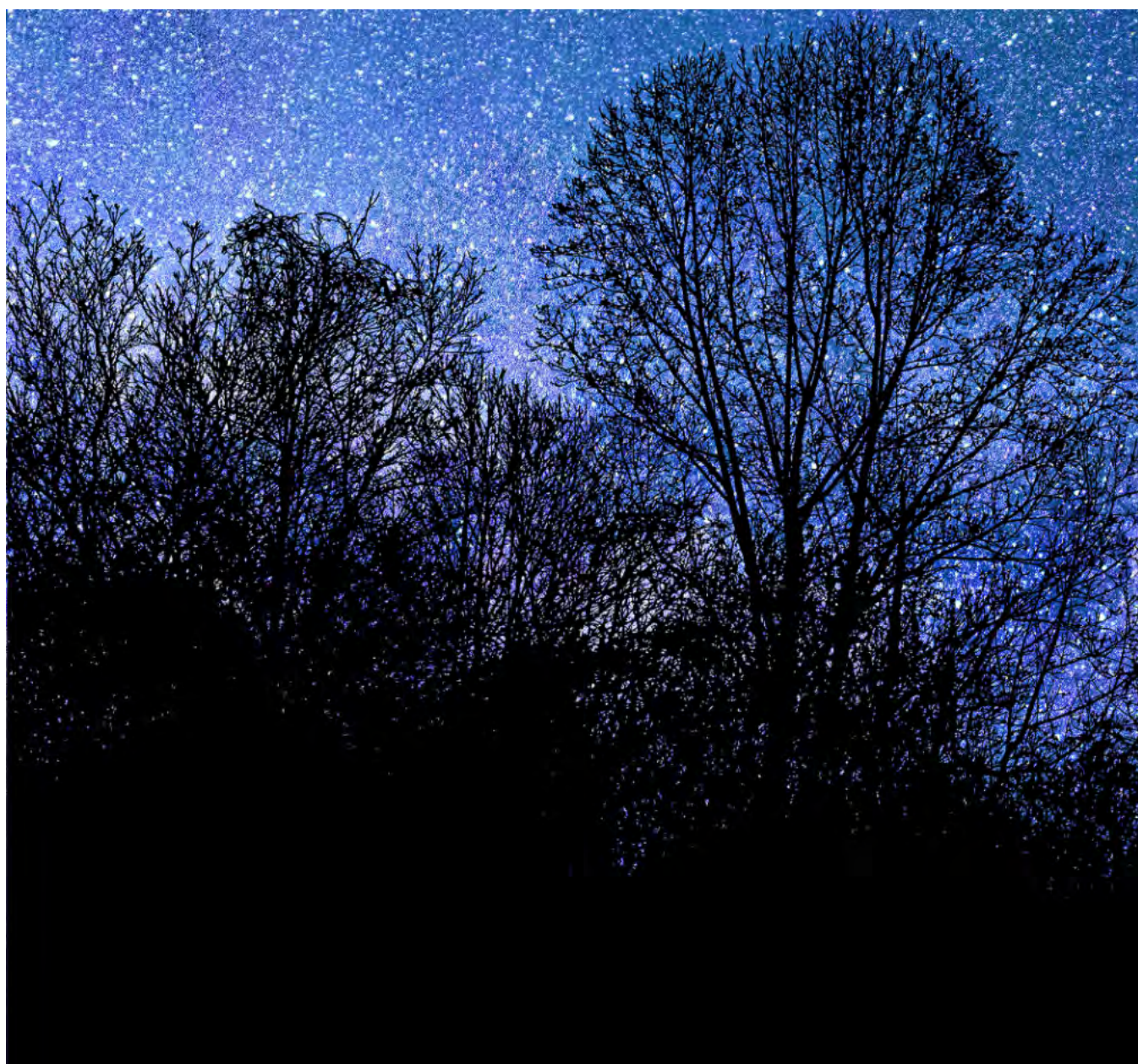


IMAGE: MAXPIXEL: [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/YBYEJ44N](https://tinyurl.com/ybyej44n)



A New Age for Humanity

MANDAKINI LUCIEN-BRUN

YEARS AGO ON AN ISLAND IN SPAIN, I HAD AN incredible experience of my mind opening into a vast realm of pale blue light, the color associated with Sri Aurobindo's consciousness. Soon afterwards I heard about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Then one day I wandered into the East-West Cultural Center (now the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles) and met its founder, Dr. Judith Tyberg, who had received the name Jyotipriya, "Lover of Light," from Sri Aurobindo.

She became a great influence on my life, as for so many others. It was August 15, 1977, and I had absolutely no idea of the significance of the date nor of the Integral Yoga. But all my being was profoundly touched when Jyotipriya said with great spiritual force and upraised hands, "Friends, we are at the dawn of a New Age for humanity!"

MANDAKINI LUCIEN-BRUN is American, also a French citizen, and is a member of the Auroville International Board.

THE FULCRUM OF MY BEING

JAYANA CLERK

I HAVE REALIZED LATELY THAT SRI AUROBINDO HAS BEEN the fulcrum of my being.

It all began at age 17 when I was reading *Savitri* in my second year of college in India. I remember reading it as fulfilling, although I had no comprehension of the philosophical or spiritual underpinnings of the work.

But understanding evolved over the years, naturally and imperceptibly, via the descent of energy, being enamored of *Savitri*, and meanderings through Sri Aurobindo's discourses on the Vedas, the Gita, and more.

Now, seven decades later, Sri Aurobindo has become the central force of my life and vision.

My latest book, *2084: The Dance of Technology and Consciousness*, is rooted in my faith in Sri Aurobindo's concept of supramental consciousness, the next stage of human evolution.

JAYANA CLERK'S teaching and creative writings focus on spiritual oneness and the social, political future of humanity.



IMAGE: GLORIA SAYAVEDRA

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

on the theme

The Divine Feminine

for

Collaboration Journal

SPRING 2023 | VOL. 48 NO. 1

DEADLINE NOVEMBER 1, 2022

We invite your contributions that share insights, intuitions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the divine feminine for the Spring 2023 issue of *Collaboration*.

WE ARE ALWAYS IN FULL, IMMEDIATE, AND INTIMATE contact with the presence Sri Aurobindo called the Divine Mother. We may not be aware of this presence, however, or if we are aware, we may be only dimly or partially so. Developing awareness of the divine feminine has played a significant role within many cultures and spiritual traditions. In our time, this is notably true for the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

We know through art and story that the divine feminine has been universally acknowledged, invoked, and celebrated for many millennia. It has been given a wide variety of names, which are essentially descriptions of a human experience of the divine feminine. Such experiences have had a powerful effect on culture, social relations, our relation with the natural world, and our bodies, as well as the development of our inmost self or psychic being.

Does the Mother have a role in your life? To what extent? How do you relate to her? How is the divine feminine influencing society and culture, and how do you perceive its presence in the world today? Do you see the time-spirit carrying forward the influence of the divine feminine? What is your experience of this powerful creative force? What has your own journey taught you? How are you trying to express, celebrate, and serve this presence?

We also invite reflections on the life of a recently departed member of the Integral Yoga community, Dakshina Vanzetti, who was dear to many, as well as being the founding member of Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham.

Poetry and short pieces as well as longer articles are welcome.—*Martha Orton and Karen Mitchell, for the Collaboration team*



IMAGE: ARTVEE / JESSEE WILLCOX SMITH

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 inspiration for the Integral Yoga community. 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, especially those that share, in ways both personal and universal, the surprises of grace, intuition, and delight in the widening—or frozen—moments of our lives. We also love to publish submissions that challenge the increasing polarization of our personal and social lives or embrace that fragmentation and find its deeper meaning and healing in the integrative and inclusive currents emerging today.

GUIDELINES

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

Invitation

SRI AUROBINDO

With wind and the weather beating round me
Up to the hill and the moorland I go.
Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?
Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow?

Not in the petty circle of cities
Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell;
Over me God is blue in the welkin,
Against me the wind and the storm rebel.

I sport with solitude here in my regions,
Of misadventure have made me a friend.
Who would live largely? Who would live freely?
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

I am the lord of tempest and mountain,
I am the Spirit of freedom and pride.
Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side.

—*Collected Poems, CWSA, vol. 2, p. 201*