

# Collaboration

Winter/Spring 2005–2006

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 31, No. 1



Shyam Kumari on Maggi Lidchi-Grassi • Martha Orton on knowledge and mastery •  
Larry Seidlitz reviews Jocelyn's book, *Antithesis of Yoga* • Current affairs •  
AV almanac • New letters on yoga • Source material • Poetry • Apropos



### About the cover

Painting of Ardhanareshwarar—half Shiva, half Shakti—by Jocelyn Shoepack and Janaka Studio. The painting is on the cover of Jocelyn's book, *Antithesis of Yoga*.

### The authors and poets

**Vigyan Agni** (agni@auroville.org.in) lives in Auroville and works at the Matrimandir. He also offers Tamil and Sanskrit courses online.

**Susmita Chatterjee** lives in Bangor, Maine; she is a poet and lectures on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy (susmita\_chatterjee@hotmail.com).

**Vasudeva Kamath** (vasudevak@yahoo.com) is a regular participant at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham and the South Bay study groups.

**Shyam Kumari** is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and is an author, poet, editor, and director of a Sanskrit school in Pondicherry. She may be reached at shyamkumari@auroville.net.

**Julian Lines** (julianlines@gmail.com) is a board member of AVI, AVI-USA, and Matagiri, and an organizer for AUM 2006.

**Martha Orton** (bearfacts@adelphia.net) is a clinical social worker in Charlottesville, VA, and is pursuing studies in Sri Aurobindo's teachings.

**Sergio Palleroni** is a Research Fellow at the Center for Sustainable Development, University of Texas, Austin (palleroni@mail.utexas.edu).

**Samatman** (samatman@earthlink.net) has worked as an ecologist, consultant, and teacher, and founded a community, "Gift Circle Farm."

**Larry Seidlitz** (larry\_seidlitz@hotmail.com) facilitates online courses for Sri Aurobindo Darshan: The University of Tomorrow.

**Prapanna Smith** (prapanna@earthlink.net) is the founder of the Center for Integral Education in San Diego and Principal of its preschool and soon-to-be-launched elementary school.

**Vladimir Stratanovich** has worked in alternative technologies, and founded a network of communities called "Ecopolis of Peace."

**Dakshina Vanzetti** (SASP@lodinet.com) is a director of Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, an ashram in Lodi, California.

## Table of contents

Collaboration, vol. 31, no. 1, Winter/Spring 2005–2006

### From the office of *Collaboration*

Notes on this issue ..... 3

### Current affairs

Center for Integral Education update ..... Prapanna Smith 4  
Building gnostic community co-creatively ..... Samatman and Vladimir Stratanovich 8  
Online university courses on Sri Aurobindo's vision ..... Larry Seidlitz 9  
News from Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham ..... Dakshina Vanzetti 10  
All USA Meeting 2006 / Integral Psychology Conference ..... Julian Lines 10  
Passing of Devan Nair ..... 11

### AV almanac

The USA Pavilion ..... Sergio Palleroni 11  
Collaboration between Auroville and the neighboring villages ..... The Working Committee 13

### New letters on yoga

The best practice ..... Vasudeva Kamath 14

### Chronicles

Mother's Little Fairy ..... Shyam Kumari 15

### Essay

Obstacles and opportunities for knowledge and mastery ..... Martha Orton 20

### Source material

On faith and shakti ..... Sri Aurobindo 25  
A way to Knowledge: aspiration, imagination, and faith ..... The Mother 26

### Book review

*Antithesis of yoga* by Jocelyn ..... Reviewed by Larry Seidlitz 28



## The poetry room

|                                                  |                    |    |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----|
| From <i>Savitri</i> : The yoga of the king ..... | Sri Aurobindo      | 33 |
| Haimavati .....                                  | Susmita Chatterjee | 33 |
| Irumbai temple .....                             | Vigyan Agni        | 34 |
| Dark face .....                                  | Shyam Kumari       | 34 |
| I feel you are not far .....                     | Larry Seidlitz     | 35 |
| A dream or a reality .....                       | Susmita Chatterjee | 35 |
| A tryst .....                                    | Shyam Kumari       | 35 |

|                      |  |    |
|----------------------|--|----|
| <b>Apropos</b> ..... |  | 36 |
|----------------------|--|----|

## From the office of Collaboration

In this issue, we feature an article on Maggi Lidchi-Grassi by Shyam Kumari, the great chronicler of the stories of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's disciples. Maggi's story is written in four parts, each with a somewhat different style, but which in combination weave an interesting account of Maggi's life, and particularly her relationship with the Mother. The story is especially interesting because of Maggi's very unique and close connection with the Mother. In this account, we learn not only about Maggi, who was involved with work in both the Ashram and in Auroville, but also about the Mother, especially about her personal manner and ways through her interactions with Maggi.

The second featured article is an essay by Martha Orton about the path to knowledge and mastery. This article focuses on some particularly crucial issues in the Yoga of Knowledge, one of the four arms of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, and does it in a way that brings it closer to home. First of all, we learn about the limitations of our mind and will, how and why we cannot really get a firm control over our lives. Then we are shown, in relatively simply terms, how we can achieve a true knowledge of ourselves and a true mastery over our nature.

We also have a review of Aurovillian Jocelyn's book, *The Antithesis of Yoga*, written by me, Larry Seidlitz. I had a difficult time writing this piece, partly because the book is a nonfictional historical novel that has many twists and turns in the unfolding of Jocelyn's experiences during Auroville's first decades. In writing this article, I was moved to try to convey something of the story, a brief synopsis, in addition to evaluating the work. I hope the review will inspire the reader to read the book and enjoy the full account, and not rest satisfied with my brief sketch.

In our current events section, we have a substantial article by Prapanna Smith on a new Integral School being launched by the Center for Integral Education, and shorter pieces on developments at the Lodi Ashram, online university courses on Sri Aurobindo's teachings, AUM 2006, and the passing of Devan Nair. In the AV almanac, we have an informative article on the USA Pavilion, and a second piece on new collaborations with the local villages. We also have a short article on human relationships in yoga by Vasudeva Kamath, source material, poetry, and apropos. This issue also features photos of four of Jocelyn's paintings and two digital art photos by Ravi Carlson.

## The artists and photographers

**Ravi Carlson**, age 13, is the son of Rich Carlson, who organized AUM 2005. Ravi was inspired by Auroville, where he took part in the 2004 New Year's meditation in the Matrimandir. He may be reached at: rcarlson@olympus.net.

**Jocelyn Shoepack** lives in Auroville and runs Janaka Studio, where she creates and sells paintings in the traditional Thanjore style using vivid colors and gold leaf. She may be reached at: jocelyn@auroville.org.in.

*Collaboration* (ISSN 0164-1522) is published by the Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA), a California nonprofit religious corporation, P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816 USA; e-mail: saa@collaboration.org; phone: 209-339-3710, ext. 6; fax: 916-451-9039. Copyright © 2006.

Photos of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, passages from their works, and excerpts from the books published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust are © Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust unless otherwise noted, and are used here with the kind permission of the Ashram. The opinions expressed in *Collaboration* are not necessarily those of the editors or the SAA.

**Staff for this issue:** Larry Seidlitz, editor and layout; G. Shantha, copy-editor.

**Subscriptions:** A one-year subscription (three issues) to *Collaboration* is \$20 (\$32 for airmail outside the USA, except in India, send Rs. 150 to Larry Seidlitz, 39 Vanniar St., Vaithikuppam, Pondicherry 605012). A patron subscription is \$40 or more. A sponsorship subscription for residents of India is \$4.

**Submissions:** *Collaboration* welcomes writing, photos, and artwork relevant to the Integral Yoga and spirituality. Submit material by email to: editor@collaboration.org; by fax at 209-339-3715; or by post to *Collaboration*, P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816 USA. *Collaboration* cannot be held responsible for loss or damage of unsolicited material. Letters to the editor may be published unless you indicate otherwise. Letters and articles may be edited for style and space considerations.

**About SAA:** The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville and supports various projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current officers: Theresa Boschert, coordinator; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; Chandresh Patel, secretary.

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



## Current Affairs

### Center for Integral Education update

by Prapanna Smith

**T**he Center for Integral Education (CIE) is poised to take a significant leap into the future. Now in the fourth year of operations of our Rainbow Kids Integral School (RKIS), we are delighted to announce the expansion of CIE into an 8,000 square-foot school-site that will house a new Integral School, Integral Elementary School of La Jolla, for grades K–6. The new school will be situated on the campus of a local Jewish Synagogue, Congregation Beth El, located in the upscale city of La Jolla. The La Jolla site lease calls for CIE to take possession of the building in August 2006. After a month of on-site preparations we will begin the school year in September, and eventually serve up to 105 children. We will also continue to operate the RKIS preschool in its present location.

#### A little bit of history

In the Fall 1998 issue of *Collaboration*, I shared with the community a vision to create the first integral education school in the USA. I reported that a new nonprofit organization, the Center for Integral Education (CIE), had been incorporated on 24 April 1998; that the board of directors of the Center had developed a mission statement which said, among other things, that the mission of CIE is to create a beautiful and engaging learning environment; and that our intention was to open a school in the Fall of 2000. When *Collaboration* published that “CIE Update” I was in Pondicherry for what I thought would be a one-year sabbatical at the Ashram. At the time, the idea of creating a school in the USA was little more than a dream that had the support of several members of the US-based Sri Aurobindo community; it was a vision which, we hoped, would become manifest in the near future. Little did I know at that time that I would be in Pondicherry for two and a half years before returning to the USA in March of 2001. And then it took another year and a half to see the vision actually manifest in a concrete way.

Today CIE, now located in the city of San Diego, California, operates the Rainbow Kids Integral School (RKIS), a preschool and early elementary school. When we first opened our doors to children in September 2002, there were only five preschool children and two teachers in the school. We rented a small classroom in a local Unity church during that first year and then moved to the school’s current site in July 2003, where it is now a thriving, bus-



*CIE Lead Team: (L–R) Nancy Walsh, Preschool Director, and members of the CIE Board of Directors, Prapanna Smith, Mrunalini Patel, and Carla Gerstein (board member Christine Taylor is missing). (Photo courtesy CIE)*

ting, joyful, sometimes noisy, but always a beautiful and engaging learning environment for about 85 children in preschool and grades K–2. Everyone who visits the school feels that it has truly become a special place for kids. When members of the Aurobindonian community come they always feel the Mother’s wonderful presence. Parents love the school and many of them have referred to us their friends, family members, and co-workers who subsequently enrolled their children into our program. Everyone reports that there is in the school a special atmosphere full of joy and sweetness. Indeed, I can honestly say that it is my experience that the Mother is constantly here in this school. Her grace is active, her presence is felt by many even if they don’t know it is hers, and the beauty and wonder she inspires in all who come here is evident in the families and kids, and in the wonderful staff she has brought to this place to work with the children.

#### Forming, storming, norming, and performing

It wasn’t easy to get this far. Our organization faced many challenges. In our first year, we went through the first of four stages of development that many organizations go through known as “forming.” During that time we made the successful attempt to allow the vision take shape in the form of a school site, infrastructure, staff members, and most important of all, a student body. All the while we literally did not know if we would be able to financially pay the rent and payroll or fund the educational program. In fact, without the support of many of you reading these words we could have easily failed before the end of that first year. For instance, a 2002 grant from the Foundation for World Education allowed us to purchase needed Montessori materials, which



are still in use in the school even after three years. Another important grant from the New Consciousness Foundation was also essential for our start up. Santosh Krinski of Lotus Light and another anonymous individual offered \$10,000 each. The late Madanlal Himatsingka initially gave \$5,000 (and in subsequent years encouraged members of his family to donate another \$8,000). Thanks to these grants and to your individual donations we raised over \$61,000 during our first year.

With the move to our current site at the end of the first year, we were well on our way to manifesting the vision. However, early in our second year (2003–2004) we faced the second stage of organizational development: “storming.” At that time our leadership team experienced an intense organizational crisis arising out of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts within and between key members of the team. Fortunately, with the help and guidance of a wonderful fellow, Dan Spinner, we worked through that one very quickly. It was also another challenging year for us financially as we ended up running a negative year-end balance of over \$13,000 that had to be covered by company credit cards, obtained by one of our board members using their personal credit. By our third year we quickly moved to stage three, “norming,” in which we continued to develop the organizational culture through which we were able to create a wonderful learning environment not only for the children, but for all members of the school staff as well.

All the dedication and hard work paid off when the CIE organization, in its third year of operating the school, truly became a fit instrument in the Mother’s hands by moving into the fourth stage of organizational development, known as “performing.” Evidence of this is abundant. First, the number of children served by the school has significantly increased in the last year (see the CIE/RKIS Facts Chart). We have developed a highly qualified and dedicated staff to serve the needs of our students. We obtained a project grant from an exceptional non-profit organization, Charity Focus, who assigned one of its affiliates, Virtual Relay, to create for us an entirely new CIE website. Finally, we co-created abundance for the manifestation of our mission by obtaining a generous equipment grant, amounting to \$125,000, from the San Diego First-Five Commission. This grant, along with the continued support from the Sri

Aurobindo community, other communities, and with the hard work and dedication of the CIE administrative team and the school staff, all guided and made possible by the Mother’s loving hand, has helped to bring us to where we are today. And the work goes on . . .

### The next step

The new Integral Elementary School of La Jolla will serve up to 105 children with a staff of 10 teachers, a librarian, and three administrative personnel. The vision calls for organizing the school into three sections: Kindergarten (15 students, 2 teachers), grades 1–3 (Section A, with 45 students, 4 teachers), and grades 4–6 (Section B, also with 45 students, 4 teachers). The Kindergarten class will be a self-contained classroom where children will become prepared to enter into the Section A program. Sections A and B will be integrated programs which will each be housed in two classrooms and share together two rooms for science and technology labs. There will also be a room for the library and another room to be designated the “Room of Silence” where students and staff can go to meditate or study in an absolutely quiet, consecrated atmosphere.

The fundamental principle supporting the integration of three grades in a section, with a low student–teacher ratio of about 10 to 1, is that the needs of each and every child are to be addressed through a highly fluid and dynamic free progress

#### CIE/RKIS Facts Chart

|                                              | 2002<br>Sept                                                                    | 2003<br>June | 2003<br>Sept | 2004<br>June | 2004<br>Sept | 2005<br>June | 2005<br>Sept | 2006<br>June |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Students                                     | 5                                                                               | 15           | 12           | 35           | 35           | 71           | 85           | 85           |
| Teachers                                     | 2                                                                               | 2            | 1            | 2            | 2            | 3            | 5            | 5            |
| Aides                                        | 0                                                                               | 0            | 1            | 2            | 3            | 4            | 4            | 4            |
| CIE Incorporation                            | 24 April 1998                                                                   |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| RIKS Launch                                  | 5 September 2002                                                                |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Address                                      | 11345 Zapata Ave.<br>San Diego, CA 92126                                        |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Phone                                        | 858-271-6985                                                                    |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Website                                      | <a href="http://www.integraleducation.org">http://www.integraleducation.org</a> |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |
| Current members of<br>the Board of Directors | Prapanna Smith, Carla Gerstein, Christine Taylor,<br>Mrunalini Patel            |              |              |              |              |              |              |              |



*First grade students using networked "Balanced Literacy" software on Macintosh computers. (Photo courtesy CIE)*

system. What this basically means is that each child, at whatever level he or she may be (below, at, or above grade level), will be able to learn and excel at his or her own pace of individual development. The CIE curriculum is designed to meet and exceed the California state standards through the integration of two tracks: a minimum syllabus met through teacher-directed learning, and an individual syllabus met through self-directed learning. In Section A, the ratio of teacher-directed to student-centered learning will be about 70 percent to 30 percent. During their growth in grades 1–3, students will develop basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, the arts and the sciences, and one foreign language (Spanish), while being allowed some time to explore their own individual interests. When they enter into Section B, the students will be guided and supported in taking greater responsibility for their own learning, where the teacher-directed to student-centered learning will gradually shift towards a ratio of about 20 percent to 80 percent. By the time the children enter the sixth grade they will have become almost entirely self-directed, intrinsically-motivated learners, who will have a rich and engaging environment where they can discover themselves and the world around them.

Up to now we have only discussed the academic program that addresses the mental education component of Integral Education. However, any true Integral Education program must also address the vital, physical and psychic domains of the human personality.

Vital education specifically covers two important lines: character development and sensorial development. Both are essential and continue throughout the educational program. Character development is addressed through the interactions of students in the classroom, on the playing field, and within the community at large. Sensorial development through the arts, music, yoga, dance, and drama will be an important component of our program.

A dedicated room for art will afford children with opportunities for painting and drawing, sculpture, paper mache, and other artistic mediums. For the performing arts, our lease allows us 15 events per year that will take place in the synagogue's large auditorium that is complete with a stage, seating for about 400 people, and kitchen facilities. In addition to programs created by the school and performed by the children, CIE will also be able hold fund-raising community events in the auditorium.

For physical education the student will play games, and learn about body awareness and cultivate the witness consciousness through the Awareness Through the Body (ATB) Program developed by Aloka and Joan in Auroville. Our plan is to send one of our staff members to Auroville some time next year for about a month to work directly with Aloka and Joan so we can faithfully introduce their wonderful ATB program in our school and make it a key part of our physical-psychic education. We feel that ATB, yoga, sports, and games will constitute the components of one of the most progressive physical educational programs anywhere in the United States today.

Psychic education is addressed in everything we do. Morning meditations, a strong emphasis on, and appreciation of, all things good, true, and beautiful, the attitude of the teachers and staff, the creation of a supportive spiritual atmosphere, and the Integral Education philosophy and practice will provide the children with many opportunities to explore their inner being, develop the witness consciousness, and learn to access what Sri Aurobindo called the "secret Veda hidden within the heart of every thinking and living being."

### **How do we get there?**

One thing is certain, there is much work to be done between now and next summer for CIE to create the kind of school described above. Up to now we have created a wonderful preschool which has always been intended to become a base for the real work, the creation of a school for school-aged children. We have now arrived at this important milestone in our work. It is, indeed, for this moment that we have been preparing over the last several years.

Now that we have a strong foundation upon which to build our future, and with the credibility gained in the local community by making every sincere effort to walk our talk, we have arrived at yet another important and crucial phase in the manifestation of this beautiful vision inspired by the Mother. All we have to do now is step up once again and respond to Her call. Can we do any less in the face of this wonderful Presence and Grace? Indeed, the Mother herself put out the call for the manifestation of such a vision when she said, "An integral education which could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, must bring back the legitimate authority of Spirit over a matter fully developed and utilized."

The CIE team is currently (as of the writing of this article—



October 2005) putting together a business plan to manifest this vision at the La Jolla site. We have done this before and have no illusions as to what will be needed to create the school. Several key components of the business plan include:

*Infrastructure and operations:* This includes material facilities, such as furniture, curriculum materials for all academic subject areas, science and computer labs, art supplies, library resources, props for ATB, and equipment for physical education. Additionally, internal operational processes are needed for student application for admissions and enrollment, teacher hiring, training and evaluation, program assessment, finance and accounting, marketing, networking, and other important administrative functions. Preliminary research for a budget to cover just the creation of the material facilities of the entire K–6 Integral Education program yielded a figure of around \$250,000.

*Marketing plan:* Student tuition will be able to cover all the school operational expenses after the initial start-up is completed. Student enrollment is therefore of critical importance not only for the purposes of serving the needs of as many children as possible, but also to be able to meet the financial needs of a true Integral Education program. Fortunately, La Jolla is the one area of San Diego that has a very significant demand for private education, and we also expect to retain as many as 20 of our current students. Nevertheless, letting the La Jolla community know about the new school will be critical. In addition to advertising locally, we will be organizing prospective parent tours of our pilot K–2 program now in operation at our current school site. A series of community presentations will also be scheduled next year.

*Financial plan:* Operations of the school during its first year will be supported by student tuition, profit from the preschool (enough to cover rent), and fund-raising. For purposes of comparison two budgets have been prepared: one with minimal enroll-

ment and one with maximum enrollment. The first of these budget estimates shows that at a minimum the school will have to enroll 25 full-time students paying tuition just below the average tuition paid at other private schools in San Diego, employ three teachers, and invest in only two classrooms. The second budget estimate shows that when the school is at maximum enrollment, fully staffed, and has the infrastructure in place, it will be able to create a positive fund balance each year that can then be invested for future growth to serve students in grades 7–12.

*Fund-raising plan:* While the school will eventually become self-sufficient, it initially requires substantial start-up funds. Successful and significant fund-raising therefore will be essential over the next 8–10 months. Besides putting out the call for support through the web, newsletters, mailings, and grant applications, we are making plans for a speaking tour to other US cities, and possibly to other countries where prospects warrant the time and expense, for the purposes of generating the support of large donors who would be open to supporting a school that wants to manifest an American version of the Mother's vision for Integral Education.

*Timeline:* For all of the above, the CIE Board of Directors is creating a timeline that will culminate in the opening of the first year of the elementary Integral School in September 2006. To the extent we are successful we will be able to faithfully manifest our vision. However, we do have chicken and the egg problem in that it is difficult to obtain students without a school infrastructure and it is difficult to create a school infrastructure in the absence of proper investment and funding. This makes the fund-raising all the more important.

### How can the Sri Aurobindo community help?

We sincerely hope that the Sri Aurobindo community will rise to the occasion to help us to continue to create the first Integral Education School in the USA. Indeed, in the Mother's name, we ask that you do so. This project is the first concrete realization of her vision of its kind to take root in American soil. As a community, we have centers, study groups, isolated individuals, an ashram, an annual gathering of sadhaks and devotees, and a couple of foundations which support the Mother's action in the USA and Auroville. But nowhere do we have an institution in the USA that can so powerfully touch the future through children. Possibilities for the future are enormous. One can only imagine what will happen when children from this school grow up and enter into the world, what ideals they will embody, what works they will manifest, what consciousness they will spread, much in the same way we see the graduates of SAICE doing today. It is not a great leap to appreciate that among our students we will find future Aurovillians, sincere sadhaks of Integral Yoga, practitioners of various spiritual disciplines, professionals, artists, scientists, parents of the future humanity, and even, perhaps, *les sur-hommes*.



*Birthday celebration in the Lower Preschool class for 2–3 year-old children: birthday-boy with the sun circled by his friend with the earth. (Photo courtesy CIE)*



Children in the upper preschool class do art everyday, and daily music, dance, or yoga as well. (Photo courtesy CIE)

So what, specifically, can we, as individuals and as a community, do? First, spread the word about this school and its vision. It is said that each human being is connected by only seven degrees of separation to every other human being on the planet. One never knows who in one's circle may have that crucial line of contact that will bring significant resources. Second, come visit us anytime you are in San Diego. Or, better yet, make a special trip to San Diego to witness first-hand our work. One can only appreciate what is happening here when seen through one's own eyes. Third, make a financial contribution in whatever amount you are able. Any amount, large or small, helps to create the channel for additional funds to flow through. Fourth, facilitate our speaking tour next year by organizing a time and venue, and inviting interested parties, for a presentation about our work. I will personally go anywhere I am called to share our work and vision with prospective supporters. Finally, and this is important, if you are, or know of anyone in our community who is an educator who would consider a move to San Diego, please let us know. We will be hiring up to nine teachers (at present we only have one) as our school enrollment warrants. I, for one, very much aspire for this school to become a place where sadhaks of the Integral Yoga can apply themselves directly to the Mother's work. Indeed, it should become a paradise not only for children but for sincere sadhaks as well. I can attest that having the opportunity to integrate my spiritual life with my vocation has been perhaps the greatest gift of my life. I would be delighted, as an instrument of the Mother, to share that gift with all of you.

*To live in the right way is a very difficult art, and unless one begins to learn it when quite young and to make an effort, one never knows it very well. —The Mother, Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 6, p. 152*

## Building gnostic community co-creatively

by Samatman and Vladimir Stratanovich

*A total gnostic or divine living would include . . . the life of others made one with the individual in a common uniting consciousness . . . This can only come by a greater identity of being and consciousness between individual and individual unified in their spiritual substance, feeling themselves to be self and self of one self-existence . . . There must be an inner and direct mutual knowledge based upon a consciousness of oneness and identity, a consciousness of each other's being, thought, feeling, inner and outer movements, a conscious communication of mind with mind, of heart with heart. (Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 1040)*

One of the unique and challenging aspects of Sri Aurobindo's great masterwork *The Life Divine* is the inspiring vision he paints of the gnostic community. He comes to it as a necessary aspect of the manifestation on earth of the supramental consciousness. His first key point is that supramental consciousness is inherently a mutual, common, or communion consciousness that is "conscious of the consciousness of all," "a close and complete consciousness of the self of others, a consciousness of their mind, life, physical being which are felt as if they were one's own," a "common self in many consciousnesses and bodies." What does this mean?

It means first of all that the awakening to supramental consciousness that is in humanity's destiny is at least a partial awakening to our essential unity with the one Divine Being, who is inherently a "common self" encompassing the essence of all in his/her Being. It also means that since the Divine is infinite ananda (bliss, delight), the more we realize together that we are this one common self, the more joy we will share.

One way of looking at it is this: Those of us who choose to open ourselves to the supramental through what Sri Aurobindo calls the "extinction of ego" will begin to experience the joys of all beings as our own. He says that one who develops this common-self consciousness by leaving behind his clinging to the false separate self will experience the joy of others as "part of his own joy of existence." When you think about it, this is an astounding prospect because such a joyful sharing of common selfhood is bound to increase one's joy without limit: I experience greater joy because I experience your joy too; you then experience a greater joy through the synergetic union of my joy and yours; I then experience your even greater joy added to my already greater joy; and so on ad infinitum. If we then imagine that there will ultimately be many millions of people sharing each other's joy in this way, we can see that the gap between the shared joy of a common-self consciousness and the current relatively joyless state of human-



ity will tend to infinity.

Does this mean that all suffering will disappear for those who move together into this more transcendent state? Incredibly, this has to be more and more the case as this transformation proceeds because all apparent suffering is due to our clinging to the false idea of a separate self. There is no suffering in the divine ananda which is our common essence.

But how do we make the gigantic leap from our current state of separative and suffering consciousness into this ocean of shared joy that is common-self consciousness? Sri Aurobindo makes a radical realization that distinguishes his vision of the transformation of humanity's consciousness from most other such visions: he realizes that it will be difficult for isolated individuals living separately in the separative patterns of modern society to come together into this state of conscious shared selfhood. So he says, "This calls for the appearance not only of isolated evolved individuals . . . but of many gnostic individuals forming *a new kind of being*" [emphasis added]. This "new kind of being" is the common-self shared by all of humanity, anchored on the physical plane by the formation of a shared-living community. He says that this gnostic community would be required because "it would be difficult for the individual to arrive at a complete change while still enclosed in the life of the lower nature" that dominates life in current mainstream society.

If we put all these pieces together, our interpretation is that a new kind of shared-living community dedicated to awakening the common-self consciousness of the supramental transformation has the potential to greatly accelerate that transformation and the associated manifestation of limitless shared joy for all of humanity. Sri Aurobindo called this new type of community a "gnostic community," but we believe that it would be more accurate and descriptive to use the "common self" term he used in describing the mutual or shared nature of supramental consciousness. This new type of community would then be a common-self community, a community dedicated to the awakening of common-self consciousness in themselves and humanity. What it amounts to is that this new type of community would be a new level of Integral Yoga, integrating the individual and collective aspects through an integration of individual and collective patterns of life.

It is important to recognize—as Sri Aurobindo himself emphasizes—that the common-self consciousness he refers to is not a totalitarian sameness that suppresses all individuality. It will include the free exercise of true co-creative individuality on the part of all community members because "the law of the supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity." However, we can exercise this true individuality only to the degree that we let go of the false separative ego-individuality to which we currently cling.

But how would we actually create common-self communities? We believe that Sri Aurobindo provides some hints. First of all, he says at several different points in *The Life Divine* that this new type of community would develop according to certain spiritual laws. We have found through many years of experience in living in

different types of shared-living (intentional) communities that there are indeed some basic laws or principles that a group needs to agree to follow if they hope to move into a deeper common-self consciousness. Sri Aurobindo also says that we will have to "evolve new and superior means of uniting consciousness inwardly with consciousness" in order to come into this deep communion with each other. Putting these two hints together has led us to develop new and superior means in the form of a 3-day experiential workshop that helps a group to apply the laws of common-self consciousness to all the details of the practical process of creating a shared-living community. We call this workshop "Building Inner Community;" the term "inner community" being another way of talking about communion or mutual consciousness. We charge no fee for this workshop, but we do accept donations to cover basic expenses.

## Online university courses on Sri Aurobindo's vision

by Larry Seidlitz

Sri Aurobindo Darshan: The University of Tomorrow ([www.the-university-of-tomorrow.net](http://www.the-university-of-tomorrow.net)) begins its fourth semester of operation 21 February 2006, offering online courses and programs of study on the thought and vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It offers four programs: an introductory Orientation Program which consists of single, semester-long, team-taught course; a Science of Living Program which focuses on practical aspects of the Integral Yoga and consists of four semester-long courses which may be taken concurrently in either one or two semesters; an M.A.-equivalent Academic Program available in nine concentrations which consists of four semesters of full-time study or eight semesters of half-time study; and a Ph.D.-equivalent Advanced Research Program which consists of three to three and a half years of full-time study. Courses in the Science of Living and Academic Programs can also be taken individually, independently of the Programs. The university has received recognition from the Government of Pondicherry permitting it to give official certificates for completion of its programs, and is presently being considered for affiliation with Pondicherry University, which if accepted, would enable it to offer advanced degrees.

The University of Tomorrow is a project of the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, which is directed by Dr. Ananda Reddy of Pondicherry. The University has a talented faculty from India and abroad as the facilitators of the courses. It has an elaborate website, which has a public area that provides detailed information about the university's inception, mission, philosophy, methods, subject areas, programs, courses, fees, and application procedures. It also features an online journal, and has some articles written by scholars/students posted in its "open forum."



Learners who enroll are given a username and password to access the private areas of the website where the courses are taught. Generally, courses are taught in a group-e-mail-like format, and are structured with specific weekly reading assignments, discussions stimulated with the facilitator's questions, writing assignments, and tests. The courses provide learners with a structured program of study supported and guided by doctoral-level facilitators who have expertise in the material. It also has a "web-links" facility, which gives quick access to many books and articles by and about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and has other features such as a general discussion café.

The university has established a relationship with Antioch University McGregor in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and is associated with Antioch's new program, Integral Knowledge Systems, a part of their Individualized Liberal and Professional Studies Program (see <http://www.mcgregor.edu/ilps/iks/index.html>). The Integral Knowledge Systems program is individually tailored to the student's interests, and includes a set of master's-level online courses in areas such as Integral Yoga, meditation, spirituality for the helping professions, and spiritual traditions of India, some of which are taught by faculty of The University of Tomorrow. The University of Tomorrow also has linked up with a Russian group who will offer the University's Orientation Program in Russian starting in February 2006. The Russian group has a new website: [www.university.integral-centre.org.ua](http://www.university.integral-centre.org.ua).

## News from Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham

by Dakshina Vanzetti

### AVI-USA and SASP collaboration continues

On 5 November 2005 another "Auroville Friends and Family Gathering" was held at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, California. Special guest, Narad Eggenberger was on hand to give a talk and answer questions about the developments at the Matri-mandir Gardens, and also share reminiscences of the Mother's words to him, her vision for the gardens, and how that is coming to manifest. In the morning there was an introductory workshop on "Building Spiritual Community" given by Samatman and Vladimir of the Alpha Farm Community in Oregon, which was inspired by Sri Aurobindo's writings on gnostic collectivity in *The Life Divine*. These gatherings continue to be jointly hosted by Auroville International USA and Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham every few months. This gathering was made all the more special by a donation from AVI-USA of a 20 foot-diameter combined Sri Aurobindo and Mother's symbol in iron that will be embedded into the foundation of the new building addition at Lodi Ashram.

### 10-year anniversary and plans for the future

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham recently marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their final move and new beginning in Lodi, California. Besides providing residential facilities for the practice of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, the small ashram community acts as a vibrant center for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in northern California, hosting monthly gatherings that have continued since 1995. These monthly retreats are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month and regularly are attended by 20–30 friends and devotees, and about twice as many on darshan days. The retreat group has evolved over the years into a serious and also joyful exploration of collective sadhana. The 19<sup>th</sup> November gathering was a day of celebration, taking stock of past growth as a collective, sharing aspirations for the future, and looking forward to the next phase of development—an expansion of facilities to better serve the needs of the growing community of friends and devotees in the region.

### New building addition

The new 3,900 square-foot wing is a major undertaking for SASP which will double the size of the existing main Ashram building. The cost for the construction is estimated to be around \$300,000, and the non-profit organization will need the financial support from friends and devotees to complete the project, which is scheduled to begin on 24 April 2006. Anyone who can help financially or with time or expertise is invited to participate.

### Matching donation fund

SASP has received a generous pledge to match donations up to \$48,000 for the project from Narad Eggenberger. Donations should be marked "New Building Project" and mailed to: Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, 2621 West Highway 12, Lodi, CA 95242, USA.

## All USA Meeting 2006/ Integral Psychology Conference

by Julian Lines

The All USA meeting (AUM) will take place July 2–6 at the former Pathworks Center near Matagiri in Phoenicia, New York. The center has undergone a major renovation since we were last there and is now under the auspices of Tibet House in New York City. Robert and Nena Thurman, who are respectively President and Secretary of the organization, have major responsibility for the Center. Bob spoke at our 1997 meeting held at Pathworks, and they both subsequently visited Auroville. The new center is named



Menla Mountain Retreat, honoring the Medicine Buddha. The meeting will feature Alok Pandey and Matthijs Cornelissen as keynote speakers and include faculty from the California Institute for Integral Studies in a focus on Integral Psychology.

Details of the conference including costs and logistics will be posted on both the Collaboration ([www.collaboration.org](http://www.collaboration.org)) and Matagiri ([www.matagiri.org](http://www.matagiri.org)) websites. If you do not have internet access, please write to AUM 2006, PO BOX 676, Woodstock, NY 12498, USA, requesting a flyer.

## Passing of Devan Nair

Devan Nair, former President of Singapore, devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and keynote speaker at various AUM conferences, passed away on 6 December 2005 at the age of 82 in Hamilton, Canada, near Toronto. He is survived by four children; his wife, Dana, passed away in May 2005. His body has been brought back to his homeland to receive proper ceremony, where television documentaries have been shown in his honor.

Devan was the third President of Singapore, serving from 1981 to 1985. Prior to that, he was a teacher and a leader in the Trade Union movement in Singapore. In 1951, Devan was detained as a political prisoner on St. John's Island. While in prison, he read extensively, and it was there he came across Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*, which changed his life.

His most important political achievement was forming the National Trades Union Congress. Mr. Lowe, head of the Teacher's Union in Singapore, said that "Devan was a seminal thinker who could see the directions in which the labour movement ought to go and the man who had conviction and the courage to push for what he believed in to be the best interest for the labour movement. It was not easy because we were in difficult times after the British pulled out and ship workers were losing their jobs. There was great uncertainty about the future of Singapore. But the labour movement was very fortunate to have a very inspiring and dynamic leader who was able to see the way forward, assemble the right people for the job and get it done."<sup>1</sup>

After serving as President, Devan emigrated with his family to Canada, and became involved with the Integral Yoga community. Devan was an active member of the Sri Aurobindo Spiritual Centre of Toronto for more than 12 years. He regularly attended the monthly gatherings for reading and meditation, and gave special presentations organized by the Center. He also had a study group in Hamilton which met regularly to read *Savitri*, and attended some meetings of the study group in nearby Burlington. Upon one of his returns from Auroville, he worked to create an organization in Toronto to support projects in Auroville. That was the beginning of Auroville International-Canada-Ontario, a branch of AVI-Canada, centered in Montreal.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocal-news/view/182396/1.html>

## AV almanac

### The USA Pavilion

by Sergio Palleroni

*This is an edited version of an article that was first published in the book Studio at Large: Architecture in Service of Global Communities. The article appeared in Auroville Today, issue 197-198 of June-July 2005.*

After years of working in marginalized, informal communities in Mexico, an international community in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu presented a dramatic change of venue for the Global Community Service program. Auroville is still largely rural, and rather than developing within a framework of infrastructure, seems to grow in small unrelated parcels when specific funding is granted. The Mother's vision included a section of the city that would become the international district, providing housing and meeting space for visitors from around the world. In 2001, several donors gave money for the construction of a USA pavilion. A previous delegation of students, from the University of Washington Comparative History of Ideas program, heard about the project and put Auroville representatives in touch with Design/Build Mexico.

The decision to accept this project for the 2002 design/build studio was not easy. For years, we had been working in impoverished communities, where our contributions fulfilled serious needs. Auroville is a well-funded community surrounded by people in serious need, and the well-funded portion would be the client for this project. On the other hand, the site, like most of Auroville, was completely without infrastructure, and this building would challenge our students to provide energy, water, and waste solutions that would test the design/build program's commitment to environmental sustainability. In the end, the opportunity to contribute an alternative model of infrastructure development that would serve to address Auroville, rural India, and many of the communities we serve worldwide by developing a building which was totally off the grid was too much of an educational opportunity for us to pass by. There was also the opportunity to learn from Auroville's and southern India's strong legacy in use of traditional sustainable materials.

In Mexico, students had been able to design a building during a two-week-long interchange with the clients held when we first arrived. As soon as they finished designing, we would break ground. Working in informal settlements, we avoided any formal design review or official supervision. In Auroville, we had to submit plans for approval well in advance of construction, and this meant scheduling our design sessions for the summer preceding the program. The 37 students met without ever having seen the



site to design a building for a culture they couldn't possibly understand. The intellectual and practical challenges were immense.

In September 2001, a delegation of three faculty members traveled to India to present the students' design to the Auroville review panel and to research practical construction matters. The resources available for construction looked good, but the building plans did not. The panel of Aurovilians overseeing the project felt that the building didn't express the identity of Auroville. After some quick design development by the faculty delegation, the panel provisionally approved the building. This bought us the time we needed to redesign on-site, in the manner of our Mexico studio, when we arrived in India with the students.

The site struck us initially as large, flat, and dry: this was by far the emptiest site we had ever been given. The first challenge for the students was to design a building that would anchor itself in the landscape and culture of Auroville so we wouldn't end up with a figural mass floating in an empty field. The students used the metaphor of an Indian banyan tree as the dominant building concept. Trees in general have immense symbolic importance in Auroville, thanks to the years of reforestation work, and because the city is planned around a giant banyan tree, this species was considered spiritually important by the Mother.

The design called for a series of four small dorm rooms set beneath a giant, separate super-roof, to create the same quality of



*The USA Pavilion sits amid a dry plain in an undeveloped area of Auroville, in the International Zone. (Photo courtesy Auroville Today)*

an "outdoor room" that a banyan tree provides in this climate. The design has the usual east-west linear orientation, presenting its broad front to the soft sunlight from the north. The super-roof shades out most of the hot Indian sun, allowing penetration only at dusk and dawn. The dorm rooms are built of heavy, earthy materials: mud bricks and rammed earth. The super-roof is built of light-weight steel and wood. In this way, the dorms seem to rise from the ground like a trunk, while the massive roof seems to hover lightly above, like branches and foliage. Each dorm room has a roof of its own, constructed of ferro-cement in the shape of a hyperbolic parabola. These four smaller roof forms seem to rest gently on the chunky building walls, suggesting leaves falling from a tree.

Every decision made in the siting and design of the building was meant to lessen the building's load on both the fragile natural environment and the limited infrastructure of this country. The first intention was to mitigate the intensity of the Southern Indian climate, which is known for its periods of oppressive heat and torrential rains. Compressed earth blocks (commonly called mud bricks) and rammed earth create thick wall sections that absorb heat in the dry climate and keep interiors cool. They also use a minimal amount of cement compared to normal bricks or concrete, maximizing the use of the cheapest and most abundant material around: dirt. While they perform well in heat, they should not be used in situations where they are exposed to intense rain, so the super-roof is instrumental in protecting the walls from monsoon rains. Furthermore, the size and height of the super-roof allows prevailing winds to pass through the larger building complex. The clerestories created by the four smaller parabolic roofs then bring these breezes into each dorm room.

The students realized early in the design process that the super-roof was a great opportunity to capture both solar power and rainwater. Several local Aurovillians donated a collection of solar arrays, and a group of students created an energy system that keeps the building entirely off the local grid. They not only



*A channel of rainwater protects the building from insects. Steel, ferro-cement, rammed earth and mahogany come together to create a rich palette of local materials. (Photo courtesy Auroville Today)*



planned how they were going to provide solar power, but also selected all low-energy fixtures and fans for the building, to limit the energy demands at the source. Meanwhile, another group of students designed a cistern and water tower to capture, store, and distribute all the rainwater collected from the roof during monsoon season.

The building's waste was another concern. Normally buildings in Auroville use standard septic tanks, but many are improperly maintained and leak dangerous waste into the groundwater table. Our students, under the direction of Professor of Forest Resources, Charles Henry, came up with a unique solution to this dilemma. They noted that black water, which includes solid waste from toilets, and grey water, which includes urine and wastewater from sinks, laundry, and showers, need very different degrees of treatment, yet in a septic system they are treated together. Black water is highly toxic but requires much less treatment. Students divided the building's waste stream into two categories: black water and grey water. The black water is treated by using a composting toilet system, where waste sits in composting bins for six months as it dissolves into compost. Grey water is treated by a reed bed and planted infiltration trenches that form part of the building's landscape plan.

This divided system means that the streams have to be separated at the source, so, while there are showers in each dorm room, all toilets are in a large bathroom at the west end of the building. Certain toilets are designated for solid waste, and others for liquid. The solid waste toilets, or composting toilets, were designed entirely by our students using available local materials such as water bins and car jacks. These toilets pass the solid material to a cabinet beneath the bathrooms that is accessible from the lower, west end of the site. Here, the waste sits in modified water bins and becomes garden compost in six months. Meanwhile, the toilets for liquid waste divert urine to the building's wastewater stream (coming from showers and sinks) and this is passed into the grey water system. The grey water treatment process begins in a settling tank, where any leftover suspended solids settle out. The remaining grey water passes into a reed bed, where a mixture of gravel and plants naturally filter out the pollutants. The nearly clean water then passes into the infiltration trenches, which are essentially long planting beds. These trenches are planted with banana trees, which have a high tolerance for poor water quality and are able to take up the nearly clean water, thereby keeping it out of the groundwater but in the natural life-cycle.

During the construction of the USA Pavilion, students worked side by side with 20–40 Indian labourers. The Indians often seemed amused or perplexed by the great lengths to which the students would go to find alternative solutions to construction and infrastructure challenges; using rammed earth proved to be



*Mimicking a south-Indian banyan tree, the super roof creates shady verandas on either side of the dorm rooms. (Photo courtesy Auroville Today)*

much slower and more difficult than we ever imagined, the bathrooms had to be built entirely from scratch, and the super-roof was a major engineering struggle.

Accentuating the problems was the language barrier: few Indians in the site area spoke English. For communication we relied on a job captain whose construction skills were superb, but who often misunderstood us and, in a very South Indian way, was too polite to let us know he didn't understand. In the end, however, the students created a building that is remarkably self-sufficient and sustainable. As long as the rains come and the sun shines, the building can produce all the energy and water sixteen guests would need, clean their waste, and keep them cool and dry. In addition, the GCS faculty considers it one of our most architecturally-rich projects to date. As the project neared completion, it was clear that the Indian workers' amusement had turned to curiosity and admiration. We hope to see some of the low-tech solutions employed in the USA Pavilion in use in the local village when we return some day to Auroville.

## **Collaboration between Auroville and the neighboring villages**

*by The Working Committee*

The Working Committee is happy to share with the community the process of the ongoing work initiated by us with the aim of improving the relations between Auroville and the nearby villages, as well as of facilitating the harmonious coordination of the development projects in those villages.

Various meetings have taken place with village Panchayats, Headmen, Councillors as well as with Aurovillians coming from those villages and the units and working groups of Auroville involved in the implementation of village-related projects. It



became clear to all that it was necessary to channel efforts and funds through a more centralized and coordinated system and structure.

This is what has been agreed in principle and is being put into motion already for the village of Edaiyanchavadi on an experimental basis:

1. There will be an *Advisory Board* of Aurovillians experienced in village relations and village-related projects to give advice on the needs, projects and work to be implemented in all the nearby villages. The Advisory Board will incorporate also village Headmen and Panchayat leaders from each of the villages where the projects are to be executed, when the discussions about those specific needs and projects take place.

2. There will be a *Financial Administration Group* for deciding and monitoring the funds allocation for all the nearby villages. From the Auroville side, the group will include representatives from Working Committee, Auroville Council, APDC, SAIIR, Land Service, ABC, and the groups/units of Auroville implementing village-related projects, plus, for each of the villages, an architect, a work coordinator, and a monitor, whenever applicable. From the village side, this Financial Administration Group will include the village Panchayat leaders and Headmen.

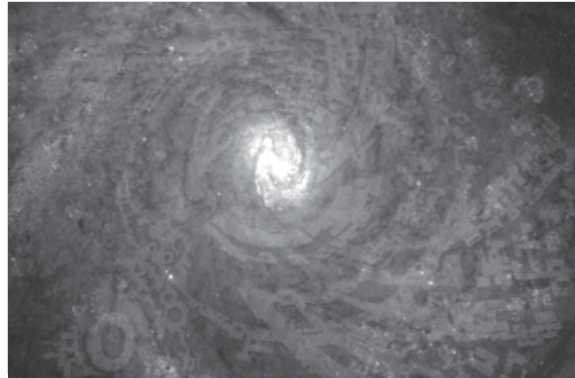
3. A *Development Council* will be constituted in each of the villages in order to coordinate the projects to be implemented. It will nominate: (a) the signatories of the joint development account which will be opened in the Financial Service of Auroville for each of the villages, and (b) the Approval Body for project implementation.

This council will be composed of Aurovillians coming from the related villages and appointed representatives from each of the villages.

4. Whenever necessary, because of the nature of the project to be implemented, responsible architects, work monitors and work coordinators will be appointed, both from Auroville as well as from the specific village.

The first material manifestation of this new effort was started on 26 October 2005, with the celebration of a pooja to inaugurate the beginning of the work for the repair of the pond in Edaiyanchavadi. Funds have been pooled from various sources, including village contributions. A joint account has been opened in the Auroville Financial Service, No. 0401.

Any question, suggestion or feedback can be sent by letter or e-mail ([workingcom@auroville.org.in](mailto:workingcom@auroville.org.in)), or be put verbally to the WC members coordinating this effort: Dhanapal, Selvaraj and Ramman. Any offer for collaboration or help is most welcome.



*The Sombrero galaxy: Auroville galaxy plan superimposed on photo of an actual galaxy. (Digital art by Ravi Carlson)*

## New letters on yoga

### The best practice

by Vasudeva Kamath

One of the best practices for humans is to remember and respect the Divine in the other person. The moment I remem-

ber the Divine in the other person, the whole perspective changes and my actions turn out to be better and appropriate.

We are fortunate to have come across Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Even though we do not have clear answers to some of the mysteries, paradoxes and complexities of life, we Aurobindonians are in a better position to find out—Who am I? Why do we feel, think and behave the way we do? How we can improve our behavior with others? How can we truly love the other person at all times?

From Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, we have learnt a few things. One of those things is that there is a soul, a divine spark in each person, which is a part of the Supreme. We are all equal at this soul level, irrespective of our color, creed, religion, and nationality. We belong to one family of God.

In our day-to-day activities, if we can understand this aspect of human beings, remember the Divine in other person, then our feeling, thinking, and acting will change—we will feel better, think well and act appropriately. This will make our work places, homes, and public places more balanced, harmonious and peaceful, which will result in increased efficiency and productivity. Dramatic positive changes would happen if the decision-makers of the world—for example, our national leaders, business leaders, religious leaders, and educational leaders—would think of this divine aspect in other human beings when making any decisions.

How to practice this simple thing? Well, let us remember what the Mother has said: “remember and offer.” Whenever there are negative tendencies arising in us, we step back, remember the Divine in the other person, and offer the situation to the Mother. I think all Aurobindonians know this, but let us put it into practice. Sri Aurobindo has said, “A drop of practice is better than oceans of theories, advices and good resolutions.” All we need to do is take care of a simple thing—to practice what we learn, and we will see the difference this creates. The world will be a better place for all when we maintain the awareness of the Divine in the other person at all times. May the Divine bless us!



# Chronicles

## Mother's Little Fairy

by Shyam Kumari

**T**his is the story of Maggi, the Mother's "Little Fairy," in four parts. The first, third, and fourth parts are based on Maggi's own words, whereas the second part was narrated by Shri Madhav Pandit. Parts one to three have not been published to date; the fourth part was published in various sections of my book, *Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, without mentioning Maggi's name.

The story deals with Maggi's early years—events leading to her coming to the Ashram, and afterwards, her close relationship with the Mother—it does not discuss Maggi's later accomplishments for which she is most widely-known, especially her three books. In the book *The Light that Shone into the Dark Abyss*, which has been translated into seven languages, Maggi writes about the dark forces behind Hitler in World War II, and Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's occult work to defeat them. It grew out of Maggi's earlier novel, *Great Sir and the Heavenly Lady*, which recounts the story of John Kelly, the American infantryman who, while fighting in France during World War II, periodically saw and spoke with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, whom he referred to as *Great Sir and the Heavenly Lady*. Only after the war did John find out who his *Great Sir and Heavenly Lady* were, and finally came to India and met the Mother. This book too has been translated into several European languages. In her third book, *The Great Golden Sacrifice of the Mahabharata*, Maggi has given an original interpretation of Vyasa's classic epic. This work has also been translated and published in French and Italian.

### Part 1: The long road to the Ashram

When Maggi was 17, in Paris, one day she went to a bookshop on Champs Elysees to find something to read. There she was attracted to a book which had on the spine a little closed lotus bud. It was a French translation of Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*. She read it—how much she understood with the mind she cannot say, except that obviously something was going inside.

One day, about two years later, in Africa, Maggi realized that Krishna was speaking to her. She had to find the thing that she had to do and that nobody else could do for her. At that time she was living between two countries in Africa, Mozambique and South Africa, and the relations with India were very strained in both these countries and there was no exchange on any level. So there were no books either. But one day she found the first volume of *The Synthesis of Yoga* in a bookshop. It is still a mystery to her how it got there—it was the only copy and in fact the only book by Sri Aurobindo. At that time in the early 1950s, one didn't see many books of yoga. Maggi went on reading *The Synthesis of Yoga* over and over again. It never occurred to her to write to the publisher. It was as though the Divine was speaking to her and one don't try to contact the Divine through a publisher. But one day somebody who had visited the Ashram told Maggi about it. By that time Sri Aurobindo had already left his body.

However, Maggi was determined to make a pilgrimage. She was married and could not quite see how she could fulfill this great yearning to be in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram. She wrote to the Mother, who was then, she admits, a secondary figure for her, speaking of her difficulty. And a reply came: when the time was right she would come to the Ashram. Maggi was very thrilled to see this letter and thought it was very kind. But the possibility still seemed very remote to her. There was no diplomatic representative for India, either in South Africa or Mozambique, and it cer-

tainly was not common for a young woman to travel to India alone in those days. In fact, Maggi had never heard of anyone doing so. Her father had been to India and was well aware of the poverty.

Her family doctor took information from the United States Information Office and was sure that he would dissuade Maggi with statistics. Apparently Pondicherry had one of the highest incidence of leprosy, filaria, and dysentery. But to Maggi, none of this information seemed to have anything to do with her.

In 1958 Maggi went to nurse her mother, who had leukemia, in the south of France. Her mother was a spiritual person of whom the Mother said on seeing her photograph that she was a beautiful soul indeed. In fact, Maggi had seen in what one could call a flash-experience that they had been nuns together in a previous life in the same convent. Maggi was with her mother for six months before she left her body. When Maggi went back to Africa, she saw that the world there had survived without her, and felt that her mother was opening doors from the other side for her. Opportunities to travel east came her way.

There was a UNESCO congress on the great religions of the world to be held in Manila, Philippines, and a friend of Maggi's who was a delegate was unable to go. With her friend's help, Maggi found that she could go as an observer. It was easy to announce to the world that she was traveling to the East for a UNESCO congress. Of course, she had every intention of coming to the Ashram afterwards. There were several hurdles, but it looked as though after years of projecting her soul across the Indian Ocean, she finally would be able to take her body too.

In fact, that is exactly how it felt like. The soul, fed on *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Maggi used to sleep with Sri Aurobindo's books under her pillow and get up at 3 a.m. to meditate), simply carried the body through all difficulties. Maggi went to Kenya to get a visa and set off for Manila, where she met a Dr. Das Gupta, exponent of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. Somebody told her to beware of coming to the Ashram as



she might fall under the Mother's spell.

After the congress, Maggi went to Japan where she stayed in a little inn and learnt *Aibido*—a martial art—in Wei Shiba's school. Shiba founded the non-aggressive Japanese art of self-defence which is never to attack. He was still alive, a beautiful and truly saintly figure with a Ming beard. He could still throw off burly aggressors, while walking around with a fan in his hand. It was here that she learnt that even physically, confrontation is far from being the best defence. It was a fascinating experience but the Ashram was pulling at her soul.

To arrive in India after almost three months in Japan was to feel a weight slipping off from the spirit. In Japan no one sought for himself, everything was regimented. In India everyone she met spoke from his or her own soul. She arrived in Madras from Colombo and took a train to Pondicherry.

A.B. Patel had come to the station to meet her, knowing that Maggi had attended the UNESCO conference. He was expecting a staid and elderly person and found a young woman in trousers. But once Maggi had established her credentials by assuring him that she had read all Sri Aurobindo's books, which by then she had ordered from the Ashram, he became a very kindly guide to her, and indeed a spiritual brother. Unfading memories of his stable wisdom and courage are part of Maggi's early Ashram experience.

## Part 2: A page from history

If history is a process of the evolution of the human consciousness on its various levels, surely the Mother's life is a continuum of concentrated history, and that too not on the earth-plane alone but also on several other orders of existence. For a close observer it was an intense edu-

cation to watch how she made and unmade things, how weaklings were transformed into heroes, age-long impediments were dissolved with one smile. Her course of action was always first to set things moving on the subtle planes then to shape their results on the physical. Dimensions lost their meaning when it concerned the Mother: she could be at the same time high above and here below, concentrated on one point locally but at the same time aware of calls from all over the universe. She was supremely divine but equally intensely human. She held innumerable threads in her beautiful hands and knew which one to pull and when. She knew but would not appear to know, she could effect

ile gait and above all her perpetual smile. Inquisitive minds found out that at her home in South Africa there were many servants working for the family. And here she was moving about without a care in the world—or so it looked.

All the while things were taking shape in another direction. When word was reached to the Mother about this visitor's arrival, Mother made a cryptic comment: "It is someone I know." We looked for further elucidation, but none was forthcoming. We had learnt not to press for more than what she would say.

Well, Maggi was presented to the Mother on 1 February 1960. Champaklal remembers—as only he can—the full con-

tour of Mother's smile and Maggi's tear-filled eyes. This was in the Pranam hall where Mother was giving blessing to all.

Very soon afterwards Maggi met the Mother alone upstairs. Her first

*Very soon afterwards Maggi met the Mother alone upstairs. Her first words to the Mother were, "I know you already, I have known you before," and tears streamed down her face.*

but did not want to. Some would say she was complex. But the way she operated was so natural. In her the divine and the human elements were delightfully fused. No instance would be happier to illustrate this side of her life than her meeting with a long lost friend who had returned to her from beyond the gates of death. We speak of Marguerite Lidchi, that little, blithe spirit who arrived at the Ashram early in 1960. I [Madhav Pandit] was one of the first persons to meet her and inform the Mother of her arrival.

Maggi—for that was how Marguerite was known to everybody then—happened to read Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* in France and was bowled over. Irresistibly she was held in the grip of Lord Krishna and she was, in spite of herself, drawn to Sri Aurobindo. She set out for Pondicherry forthwith. She knew nothing of the Mother at that time. And when she arrived she found herself quite at home. Everyone liked her, her petite form, her ag-

words to the Mother were, "I know you already, I have known you before," and tears streamed down her face. Both meditated together for a long time.

How did she feel she had known Mother before? Obviously her inner being knew it though on the surface Maggi could not perhaps explain. But Mother explained it in detail to Champaklal. And here is the story, or rather facts which look like a story.

When Mirra [the Mother] was young, pursuing her studies in art in Paris, she had a friend of her own age, a dear friend—"and the only friend" as Mother took care to mention—and her name was Valentine. Their friendship was deep, so deep that when after her marriage Valentine had to leave for Egypt, she was so miserable to part from Mirra that she lost all taste for life. No wonder she left her body—soon afterwards (when only 19 years old)—at childbirth, a day before André was born to Mirra.



It is interesting to recall that Mother had painted a picture of this friend, a miniature which still retains its exquisite fresh pastel colors because it was painted on ivory. It is a portrait of a beautiful young woman dressed in the style of the times, just before the turn of the century, in a white gown with a white gardenia pinned to the shoulders. She wears a triple row of pearls. The face is sensitive but the eyes show the sadness at the impending parting. The Mother had brought the miniature with her to India and later gave it to Maggy, telling her, "I loved you very much then and I love you even more now. You came back very quickly." Of course to Maggy it seemed to have taken a long time. Once they met here, however, Mother showered her blessings and gifts, both inner and outer, so lavishly on her that all the longing of the past was forgotten.

In the beginning, things were slow to develop, but very soon the old intimacies seem to have returned, though of course with some new dimensions added.

Writing on 3 November 1964, Mother turned Maggy into Maggi (Maggi—close to Mother); she writes:

"Maggi, my dear child,

I am really happy with the manner in which your sadhana is developing and your growing receptivity."

Interesting developments followed. Mother became aware of a fairy who had attached herself to Maggi and was always present. Of her the Mother was to write:

"I have to tell you that my perceptions concerning you are becoming more and more precise—and that I am convinced that your vital is united to a charming little fairy, charming, smiling attractive, who



*The Mother's painting of her friend, Valentine, who died young and was reborn as Maggi (Reproduction courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust)*

likes to do pretty little miracles that give a special flavor to human life, quite dull in general.

"Your presence is a joy and your collaboration is precious . . .

And I too love you."

That was not all. Maggi herself turned into Mother's Fairy. For on her birthday, Mother wrote:

"To my sweet little fairy who brings a ray of sunshine to this earth."

Mother would address her as her sweet fairy, her good fairy, on the cards and letters addressed to her.

Maggi once asked Mother if the fairy had been with her since her birth and Mother said, "Probably," but that in any

case she had arrived with her in the Ashram (in order to come into contact with Mother).

I hope I am breaking no confidences if I were to mention that Mother's love for Maggi would flow at times in enveloping embraces, peals of laughter. Mother observed that when Maggi came into the room it was like being in a garden. The fairy used to weave gardens around them.

One day in a more solemn moment Mother asked Champaklal to bring a card. He brought once, she asked for a bigger card. Then she took Maggi's hand with her forefinger drew four circles in the palm and joined them with lines. Then she took a deep breath and put her chin on her chest and closed her eyes in concentration. "I have just created an order," she spoke. Thereupon Champaklal gave her the card and she wrote:

"Maggi, *Chevalier de la Gentillesse*," which can perhaps be put in English, "Knight of the Order of No-

bility."

There was an interesting sequel. Much later, when Nata and Maggi started a home for children in Udavi where there is the Auroshikha Agarbatti factory and the school, and Maggi was asked to give a name, she heard the Mother's voice saying: *Gentillesse*.

Speaking of Nata, Maggi considers that one of the biggest gifts she was to receive from Mother was her companionship with Nata. Nata, it will be recalled, was a splendid nobleman (Italian) who had settled in South America. On his very first visit to the Ashram, he had been taken to see the Lake Estate when the developmental program had yet to take shape. But what



he saw before him moved him so deeply that without a single thought, he took out all the money that was in his pockets—some thousands—and gave it as his contribution to the sadhaks who accompanied him there. He was responsible for initiating and developing the program of publishing Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's writings in Italian; he even started a journal. He was generosity personified. I may mention that though we hardly met once or twice, a deep inner relation had developed between us. He would occasionally write asking for certain clarifications. He would suddenly inundate me with boxes of high quality incense. The contact did not cease with his passing. He visits our place now and then, warming it with his soothing presence.

Mother's last birthday card to Maggi reads: "Good secretary and excellent disciple."

Incidents bringing out the depth of the relations between Mother and Maggi could be multiplied. I will only cite a couple of interchanges. In one letter Mother writes:

"Maggi, my dear little fairy, you are adorable and it is a great joy to be served by you. With all my tenderness and my blessings."

Maggi writes: "Adored sweet Mother, I love you now and for ever. Your Maggi."

Mother replies: "Adorable little Maggi, I love you."

And the love continues. Mother's physical withdrawal has not interrupted it. Maggi is never alone.

A couple of months after Mother had left, an Italian disciple, an artist by the name of Judi Cozzi, while visiting the Ashram, met with a serious accident, and while she was being operated on, left her body. She met Mother whom she asked if she must really go back to her body lying on the operation table. Mother directed her to return explaining to her what her work would be. She told her also to give Maggi the following message: Mother would send a little child to Maggi and that Maggi must not forget that the child came from her.

So Judi called Maggi and spoke of this. Maggi, however, did forget. When she took the child to visit Judi in Dr. Sen's nursing home, Judi said to her, "There is the child that Mother sent you." You can imagine Maggi's feelings.

There was once a period of financial crisis in the Ashram. Someone told Maggi of it. She immediately took out all the money that was with her at the moment and made it over to Mother. Mother was to narrate this to me much later, adding, "Maggi is a good girl." And beautiful too, beautiful of form and soul.

### Part 3: The turning point

The experience started in the afternoon. It was a Mahakali experience, because some Force came down which Maggi had called for transformation. When it came there was resistance at one tiny point; almost a legal point on which she was arguing with the Force, and since she would not give in on this one point. It happened like this. Maggi was meditating a lot, not because of discipline, but because she was seized by meditation. The meditation was getting more and more strong. On that fateful day Maggi had finished writing a novel to which she was attached and which now she was revising. She started to meditate to get a higher consciousness to revise it and a great Force enveloped her. Then she heard a silent voice say, "This Force is not for the revision of the book, it is not for anything close but for the transformation of the being." This knowledge was so sure and wonderful that one had no wish to ignore it and Maggi tore up and threw away that novel welcoming the Force. Maggi asked, "What else should I do?"

Immediately Maggi knew the only thing she was attached to was the person whom she loved, for whom she had waited the whole of her life. Spontaneously she said to the Divine, "Yes, he does not belong to me. My surrender is complete. You may part us." After a time she added, "But you must do it, don't ask me to give the blow. It is for you to do it."

There seemed to be a pause from the Force. Maggi said, "feel there is nothing else." Still the Force hovered as though to say, "Are you sure? Have you surrendered everything?" Maggi searched herself and there was something. She said, "The only thing is, do not ask me to leave him, do not ask me to wound him, for he is not ready" (he was not).

Maggi felt some uneasiness which she correctly interpreted as the pressure from the Force. She was somewhat shocked. She said to the Force whom she was treating as a person, as the Divine, "Can you imagine how ignoble it would be? He has helped me to open to you after a period of aridity. Do you expect me to use him as a step ladder to you then kick him away?"

There was a silence. Maggi began to get a very uneasy feeling that it was exactly what was expected of her. She said to the Force, "I told you I do not want anything from him, I do not even ask to see him. If you like, it is what you want, you make it happen; I cannot."

The uneasy feeling in the solar plexus now increased considerably and Maggi's resistance grew proportionately. When the pressure turned into a dull pain, Maggi said to the Divine Force, "You can torture me but I will not give in, you can crush me, you can kill me, but on this point I stand."

The Divine seemed to take Maggi at her word, for she felt so bad that she had to lie down and she said to the Force, "Are you a torturer?"

She was still feeling very virtuous about her noble gesture. The Divine took Maggi at her word and began to crush her. It was as though the universe was crushing down at her solar plexus. There was no longer any question of resistance. The pain was so excruciating she knew she would not be able to bear it and finally agreement was wrenched from her. "Yes, yes, I agree. All right, all right."

But it was no true surrender and came too late. The guiding voice demanded, "Are you willing to have the dead parts of your heart removed?"

With eagerness, Maggi said, "Yes,



yes, yes.”

To cut the story short the “operation” was so painful Maggi was afraid that she would go mad or die. In her heart she reproached the Mother for not helping her. She thought, “I have put my life in the hands of someone who does not understand about Yoga.” She wished heartily she had never heard of Yoga. Just then the Mother sent her a “Grace” flower.

She knew that she should not move. For the whole of the night she lay paralysed, for about 12 hours. The next morning again the Mother sent her a Grace flower and wrote a message, “It is only in the silence that the Truth descends.” And with that came immediately the understanding of the experience and the Truth began to descend and was able to break the resistance in 36 hours which might have otherwise taken decades or lifetimes. She understood, “Nothing belongs to us, not even the protection of those whom we love.”

She learnt to love in a liberated way due to the above experience. She related the experience to the Mother. The Mother said, “I know when you are sincere and persist the Divine can save you through the chink in your armor. It is in fact the chink in your armor that can attract this Grace. But you have to be really sincere.”

#### **Part 4: From *Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother***

Once on her birthday, Maggi took all her precious things and all her money to offer to the Mother—as much as she could get at that time. Amongst the offerings was her favorite silver vase. Holding the vase in her hands the Mother said, “You will have nothing left for yourself?”

Maggi replied, “Mother, don’t you know the Tagore story? One day God came to a beggar and held out his hand for alms. The beggar said, “Lord! Are you mocking me?” He expected to get everything from the Lord, and here the Lord was holding out his hand. Anyway, he opened the bag containing his little store of grain, and out of it he gave one grain to the Lord. Later when he opened his bag, he discovered

that it contained one grain of gold. He lamented, “If only I had given my all to the Lord!”

The Mother liked the story very much, and said, “When the Divine comes to earth, he comes without anything. He is a beggar.”

Then she wrote out the same words for Maggi.

\* \* \*

On one occasion, the Mother said to Maggi, “At an equal stage of spiritual advancement women have a certain advantage over men because the heart-centre is more open.”

\* \* \*

Once the head of woman’s social service organization from Madras came to visit the Ashram with all the members of her club. She wanted to take all of them for the Mother’s darshan and blessing. Maggi put their application before the Mother. The Mother didn’t seem to be interested. Then she enquired of Maggi, “What do they do?” “Sweet Mother, they are working for the betterment of children,” answered Maggi.

“Oh! Any work for children is commendable.” Saying this the Mother at once granted them permission for her darshan.

\* \* \*

The Mother’s room was full of bric-a-brac: loving offerings from her children. Maggi used to clean the Mother’s room. Even though she tried to be very careful, one day a china rose got entangled in the folds of her sari and fell and broke. Of course Maggi was upset; but the Mother consoled her by saying, “Never mind, it will bring us luck.”

\* \* \*

On another occasion while cleaning the Mother’s room, Maggi opened a window which had not been opened for quite a long time. Though the glass was shining, a testimony to the loving care of the disciples who cleaned it, there was an accumulation of dust in the space between the inner and outer frames. Maggi was pleased to have found some dust to clean which no one else had noticed. So delighted was she with herself that she failed to close the

window-latch properly when she had finished. That night a fierce storm raged and the window flew open with a bang. But the Mother didn’t even mention this to Maggi, who only came to hear about it from some other people.

\* \* \*

Once Maggi bought a handmade Portuguese shawl for the Mother. The Mother had her photograph taken wearing that shawl [playing the organ]. She said, “Maggi will be happy to see this photograph.”

\* \* \*

[At Mother’s direction, a kindergarten was established at Udavi, in the poor village of Edayanchavadi, in Auroville.] At first there were two enthusiastic young teachers who every single day cycled the distance of 14 kilometers uphill from Pondicherry; even during the monsoon they never missed a day. The children flourished, and each year a new class was added.

At Udavi the children are given three meals a day, including nourishing things such as sprouted legumes; each day they take their bath at the school and are provided with a freshly-washed and ironed uniform . . . and in fact with everything from toothbrushes to notebooks. By the loving dedicated service of our Maggi and Anuben, [by 1989] the school had reached the ninth standard. It seeks as far as possible to teach through the methods the Mother always advocated; the young children learn through games that are made by the teachers to match their learning-needs. These games have begun to draw attention, and UNICEF proposes to show them to the educational authorities of other Indian states and to facilitate visits of educationists to Udavi school for workshops on the use of educational games . . .

Slowly the Mother’s dream is taking shape. Each morning the children hear Sunil’s music and sing the Mother’s prayer: “Douce Mere, permet que nous soyons dès maintenant et pour toujours simplement tes petits enfants.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sweet Mother, grant that we may be, now and forever, simply Thy little children.



## Essay

# Obstacles and opportunities for knowledge and mastery

by Martha Orton

### The Issue

According to Sri Aurobindo, human beings are fundamentally motivated by an impulsion to seek knowledge and mastery. This motivation drives them to progress from initially seeking practical knowledge of the external world for physical survival and then beyond through a range of increasingly higher levels to their fulfillment. The knowledge and mastery which human beings seek is ultimately spiritual and, in attaining it, they not only discover liberation from ignorance and suffering, but they also fulfill the purpose of their existence in uniting with their divine origin.

Sri Aurobindo describes his conception of the pursuit of knowledge and mastery and its relation to the central problem of human life in the following statement:

The whole crux and difficulty of human life lies here. Man is this mental being, this mental consciousness working as mental force, aware in a way of the universal force and life of which he is part but, because he has not knowledge of its universality or even of the totality of his own being, unable to deal either with life in general or with his own life in a really effective and victorious movement of mastery. He seeks to know Matter in order to be master of the material environment, to know Life in order to be master of the vital existence, to know Mind in order to be master of the great



Martha Orton is writing a thesis on Sri Aurobindo's theory of human motivation. (Photo courtesy Martha Orton)

obscure movement of mentality in which he is not only a jet of light of self-consciousness like the animal, but also more and more a flame of growing knowledge. Thus he seeks to know himself in order to be master of himself, to know the world in order to be master of the world. This is the urge of Existence in him, the necessity of the Consciousness he is, the impulsion of the Force that is his life, the secret will of Sachchidananda appearing as the individual in a world in which He expresses and yet seems to deny Himself. To find the conditions under which this inner impulsion is satisfied is the problem man must strive always to resolve and to that he is compelled by the very nature of his own existence and by the Deity seated within him; and until the problem is solved, the impulse satisfied, the human race cannot rest from its labour. Either man must fulfil himself by satisfying the Divine within him or he must produce out of himself a new and greater being who will become more capable of satisfying it. He must either himself become a divine humanity or give place to Superman. (*The Life Divine*, pp. 208–209)

In considering the human impulsion for knowledge and mastery, this essay will focus on two obstacles to attaining them: the limitations of human mentality and the influence of nature on human life and action. It will show how these two obstacles can be surmounted, and how through a change in consciousness the purpose of human existence can be fulfilled.

### Limitations posed by human mentality

While the mind is the instrument on which we depend for obtaining and processing information about life and the world around us, it does this through a process of separation and analysis. This means that it works through seeing things in parts and using its processes of reasoning and synthesis to put things in appropriate relation to each other, that is, to make sense of its observations. Sri Aurobindo explains that this results in incomplete and inaccurate knowledge, in effect, a knowledge-ignorance, because of the divided, rather than unified, nature of its approach. The mind cannot see the true wholeness or essence of that which it seeks to know. The fact that the senses themselves contain potential for error compounds the problem, as do the natural limitations on gathering all relevant information needed to obtain a complete view.

In reflecting on the limitations of human mentality, we can see that the human mind limits our perceptions and understanding of our world and stands as an obstacle to our mastery of our existence. Our inadequate and inaccurate knowledge impairs our ability to know truly and fully what it is that we want to master and what results we want to achieve. We cannot conceive our true goals if the mentality which we use to do so is itself faulty. This is the natural result of not being able to know truly in the first place. In consequence, we operate with flawed and incomplete information and, as a result, with flawed judgment, when we seek to master our lives. We are in a situation akin to the problem of putting inaccurate or incom-



plete information into a computer and getting ineffective results. One might also draw an analogy with the process of conducting empirical research, for this is an example of attempting to use the highest quality, most valid information available and drawing conclusions from it, conclusions which merit use as the basis for further decisions or action. The results of research can only be as good as the data collected and analyzed. So too, the results of our thought processes can only be as good as the data we collect and analyze with the thinking mind.

With this more objective view of our attempts to gain mastery in life situations we can understand that in many cases if we were to achieve the ends we seek, they would not work to our ultimate benefit and might instead have unintended harmful consequences. We experience some sense of this when we determine through hindsight the effects of some of our decisions and actions in life. Since the limitation of human mentality, that of not being

able to know truly, is inherent in our quest for mastery, it impairs our movements each time we seek it. Therefore, we may conclude that it is not possible for us to attain true mastery in life through the use of the mind, because we are working with inaccurate and incomplete information. To give a relatively common example, an individual may have as a goal experiencing success in his or her career and think that a particular position will fulfill this. In doing so, the individual does not actually know what the outcome may be. He or she may feel that it is an advancement, yet it might result in less job security in the long run with the position being eliminated in the employer's later restructuring of the organization. Not being promoted and seeming unsuccessful in the short term might, instead, lead to a more positive result in the long term.

## Types of mastery sought

Before proceeding to identify further difficulty in human attempts at mastery, it is important to clarify the understanding of the type of mastery which we are attempting to address. The mastery under discussion here is intended to be very much on the individual human scale, not that of the inflated aberrations of megalomania of which human beings are sometimes capable. It can be seen as having two aspects. The first is simply the drive to attain mastery of ordinary events, the kind of mastery that individuals seek related to the anxieties of daily living and anxieties which, when taken in sum or to extremes, can result in general mental misery. Examples of these would be the drive to master aspects of one's education or career, such as attaining the things that an individual

truly the nature of things and of existence. This urge for mastery is the deeper seeking which human beings express and comes more directly from the inner being than the impulsion for mastery of transitory external events. As we have seen previously from Sri Aurobindo's descriptions of the limitations of the mind, human beings are generally trapped in a situation of not truly knowing, not truly understanding life and the world and its deeper reality, and this state leads to anxiety and suffering. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother assert in their writings that this remains the situation unless and until human consciousness is transformed and individuals are able to rise above the level of mind, into a truer knowledge, and discover there the answer to human ignorance and all the problems which accompany it.

## Origins of the urge for mastery

In addition to the problems associated with the limitations of the mind, there is another problem with human attempts to achieve

*We may conclude that it is not possible for us to attain true mastery in life through the use of the mind, because we are working with inaccurate and incomplete information.*

feels successful for having accomplished in these areas, or perhaps making and keeping friends, being able to buy and maintain a home, having a long life, or being able to know that one's children are happy and well. These are among the kinds of human thought that are associated with the impulsion for mastery in life. The individual essentially says to himself or herself things such as: "I want this to happen so that everything will be all right. Maybe if I do this or that then things will be better." This kind of concern for the details of life builds into a larger cloud of anxiety and worry about what will happen and what to do about it.

This sense of not knowing also relates to the second aspect of mastery, which is the larger and deeper urge to gain some degree of mastery of life and the world through understanding and knowing more

mastery, one which relates to the nature and quality of our impulsions themselves. For example, when we think that we want something to happen, how do we know that this is what we actually want? Where does this desire come from? If we say that it comes from our own mind and feelings, can we know that this is true? We can assure ourselves that the desire is based on what we know about a given situation and our personal judgment about what would be best for us, based on our experience and the knowledge we have of the situation and factors involved. Yet, this claim needs to be considered somewhat specious. In addition to the imperfection of the superficial mind, there is the issue of whether we do, in the truest sense, actually originate our thoughts, emotions, and desires. If we do not generate our own thoughts and feelings, then any sense of

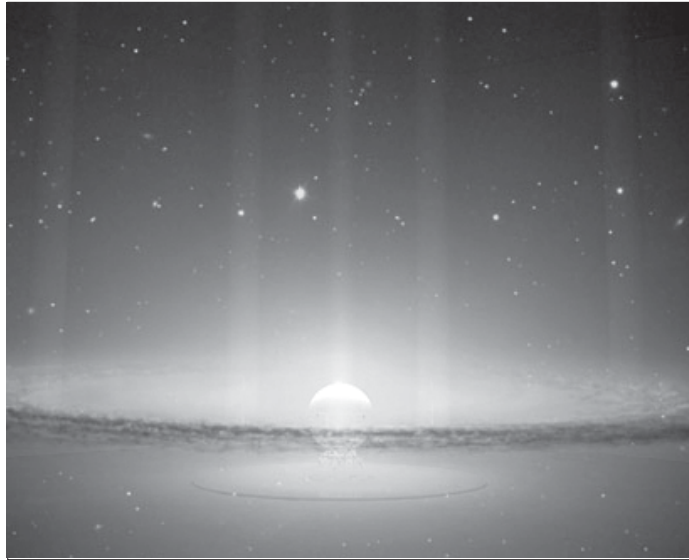


mastery or control we might appear to achieve would be based on an illusion. If we consider the extent to which we are subject to human nature and the forces of universal nature, we can see that we are not truly free to think and feel in an independent, individual fashion, but are rather influenced and driven by nature. Nevertheless, we still perceive these to be our own thoughts and feelings, and attempting to satisfy these gives an illusion of seeking mastery in one's life. Furthermore, whatever mastery of our life circumstances we may feel we achieve is necessarily transient because of the constantly changing nature of life itself.

In his writings on this issue, Sri Aurobindo explains that to the extent that we are subject to nature, nature is in control. He describes the problem as follows:

For, existence and consciousness and force being one, we can only have some real power over so much of our existence as we are identified with by self-awareness; the rest must be governed by its own consciousness which is subliminal to our surface mind and life and body. And yet, the two being one movement and not two separate movements, the larger and more potent part of ourselves must govern and determine in the mass the smaller and less powerful; therefore we are governed by the subconscious and the subliminal even in our conscious existence and in our very self-mastery and self-direction we are only instruments of what seems to us the Inconscient within us.

This is what the old wisdom meant when it said that man imagines himself to be the doer of the work by his free will, but in



*Matrimandir crystal. Digital art by Ravi Carlson.*

reality Nature determines all his works and even the wise are compelled to follow their own Nature. (*The Life Divine*, p. 212)

In and of itself, nature's influence in human life need not be denigrated as completely negative. Subjection to nature is a necessary stage in humanity's evolution to surpass identification with mind, life and body. Sri Aurobindo explains that the Divine works through human nature, working with the nature of each individual, using its strengths and capacities, as well as weaknesses, as tools for the individual's overall development. Also, if we refer to developmental psychology, we can find models of human development which offer reassurance about the advantages of nature's influence. For example, Erik Erikson writes of a series of stages of development which culminate in a certain level of self-fulfillment and wisdom. Similarly, Abraham Maslow offers a developmental progression which includes a highly spiritual level of development which can be construed to go beyond the constraints of human nature and the limits of nature, as we conceive of it. The questions then arise of how do we break free from nature's control and, if we do so, can we gain mastery in life, can we arrive at something higher and better?

## Transcending nature

Sri Aurobindo tells us that through the process of Integral Yoga, human beings can grow in consciousness and transcend nature. Through the process of offering one's work, knowledge, and love to the Divine, the individual transfers control of one's life from the forces of nature to the Divine Force. Paradoxically, in the movement of self-offering, one gains a greater freedom than ever before. One becomes increasingly free of the bonds of nature and, in becoming closer to the Divine, more of the true inner self is

revealed and experienced. The individual becomes more of his or her true self. This being so, the individual's true wants and needs can be more fully met, those that serve the growth and fulfillment of the inner being, rather than the urges and impulses of the surface nature.

Sri Aurobindo writes of several basic qualities of our human nature which must be addressed in the process of transcending nature. These are the three psychological modes of being identified in the ancient literature as the *gunas*: *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. He describes them as follows: "Sattwa is the force of equilibrium and translates as good and harmony and happiness and light; *Rajas* is the force of kinesis and translates in quality as struggle and effort, passion and action; *Tamas* is the force of inconscience and inertia and translates in quality as obscurity and incapacity and inaction." (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 220–221) Sri Aurobindo explains the pervasive influence of these qualities: "Each thing and every existence in the lower *Prakriti* contains them and its process and dynamic form are the result of the interaction of these qualitative powers." (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 221) While one can more readily conceive that it is important to transcend the *gunas* of *rajas* and *tamas* in the journey to union with the



Divine, Sri Aurobindo explains that all three must be transcended in order to break free from nature:

A radically different movement has to draw us back from the gunas and lift us above them. The error that accepts the action of the modes of Nature must cease; for as long as it is accepted, the soul is involved in their operations and subjected to their law. Sattwa must be transcended as well as Rajas and Tamas, the golden chain must be broken no less than the leaden fetters and the bond-ornaments of a mixed alloy. The Gita prescribes to this end a new method of self-discipline. It is to stand back in oneself from the action of the modes and observe this unsteady flux as the Witness seated above the surge of the forces of Nature. He is one who watches but is impartial and indifferent, aloof from them on their own level and in his native posture high above them. As they rise and fall in their waves, the Witness looks, observes, but neither accepts nor for the moment interferes with their course. First there must be the freedom of the impersonal Witness; afterwards there can be the control of the Master, the Ishwara. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 226)

Therefore by standing back from the movements of our human nature and their qualities of inertia and inconstancy, struggle and passion, and even harmony and goodness, we can observe the movements of nature, of Prakriti, and from the position of witness, we can see how nature works in us and dictates our movements, both in thought and action. Sri Aurobindo explains that from this observation we can come to see that we have not been our own masters as we supposed. He states:

The force and propulsion come from Prakriti and not from the creature.

Then he realizes how mistaken was his impression that his mind was the doer of his works; his mind was only a small part of him and a creation and engine of Nature. Nature was acting all the while in her own modes moving the three qualities about as a girl might play with her puppets. His own ego was all along a tool and plaything; his character and intelligence, his moral qualities and mental powers, his creations and works and exploits, his anger and forbearance, his cruelty and mercy, his love and his hatred, his sin and his virtue, his light and his darkness, his passion of joy and his anguish of sorrow were the play of Nature to which the soul, attracted, won and subjected, lent its passive concurrence. And yet the determinism of Nature or Force is not all; the soul has a word to say in the matter,—but the secret soul, the Purusha, not the mind or ego, since these are not independent entities, they are parts of Nature. For the soul's sanction is needed for the play and by an inner silent will as the lord and giver of the sanction it can determine the principle of the play and intervene in its combinations, although the execution in thought and will and act and impulse must still be Nature's part and privilege. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 224)

While the soul has given its sanction, the outer nature is seen to be subject to universal nature and determined by its play. Although the process and dynamics of this action advances the experience and growth of human beings, one cannot but seek to be free of this bondage when one comes to the point of awareness of seeking to move beyond the dramas of the ordinary level of human consciousness. It is through the experience of subjection to nature that we grow to the point where we sense that there is something else in life, a higher truth and reality that is associated

with the Divine. We aspire to live this higher truth instead of maintaining the cycle of existence we have previously experienced. It is then that the soul seeks to break free, to rise above the gunas, transcend human nature and move toward the divine reality which it senses as the true basis of existence. The fulfillment of this urge of the soul becomes possible through the process of surrender, including the surrender of all the aspects of one's nature to the Divine. This surrender gradually frees the individual from bondage to nature and transfers control of the individual's life to the Divine Shakti.

The detachment of the witness as observer helps advance the process of inner growth and surrender, for it offers the opportunity to see the ego and the illusory sense of control as movements of nature. Their insignificance and unreality, seen from this perspective, make them remarkably less appealing, helping the witness further to detach from them. Sri Aurobindo describes this experience vividly:

The initial advantage of this process of detachment is that one begins to understand one's own nature and all Nature. The detached Witness is able to see entirely without the least blinding by egoism the play of her modes of the ignorance and to pursue it into all its ramifications, coverings and subtleties—for it is full of camouflage and disguise and snare and treachery and ruse. Instructed by long experience, conscious of all act and condition as their interaction, made wise by their processes, he cannot any longer be overcome by their assaults, surprised in their nets or deceived by disguises. At the same time he perceives the ego to be nothing better than a device and the sustaining knot of their interaction and, perceiving it, he is delivered from the illusion of the lower egoistic Nature. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 226)



When the gunas are transcended and through surrender the being becomes more fully under the direct control of the Divine Force, these modes of nature are transformed into the higher, divine versions of the qualities they represent. This action parallels the ascent of the inner being to its divine unfolding in which its true higher nature is revealed. Sri Aurobindo describes *tamas* as being “replaced by a divine peace and eternal repose out of which is released as from a supreme matrix of calm concentration the play of action and knowledge.” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 229) He tells us that “*Rajas* is replaced by a self-possessed power and illimitable act of force.” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 229) Sri Aurobindo describes the divine fulfillment of *sattwa* as follows: “*Sattwa* is replaced by an illumination and a spiritual bliss identical with the depth and infinite existence of the soul and instinct with a direct and authentic knowledge that springs straight from the veiled glories of the secret Omniscience.” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 229) These modes of being become fully at the direct service of the Divine, rather than serving the movements of nature. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the significance of the transformation of the gunas in the following statement: “The transcendence of the three modes of Nature is the first condition, their transformation the decisive step of this change by which the Way of Works climbs out of the pit of narrowness of our darkened human nature into the unvalled wideness of the Truth and Light above us.” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 230) Therefore we see how this transcendence of the gunas is an essential step in the process of surrender of one’s life and works to the Divine Force. Growing in consciousness, one leaves behind

the influence of nature, including the faltering movements of the surface mind, ego, and personality. Being free from these, one gains more of oneself, in surrendering oneself, one takes back control from the forces which are not aligned with the truth of one’s being. In this process one comes to the understanding that one has not had true control in one’s life and that any sense of this has been an illusion. The sense of mastery was a flight of fancy of the ego, and was all the while subject to the forces of nature.

### The deeper meaning of mastery

One may conclude that the sense of individual mastery is essentially an illu-

*The detachment of the witness as observer helps advance the process of inner growth and surrender, for it offers the opportunity to see the ego and the illusory sense of control as movements of nature. Their insignificance and unreality, seen from this perspective, makes them remarkably less appealing . . .*

sion, for though the individual can make choices and assert his or her will, this form of will or expression of preference or desire originates in nature and not in the inner being, the true self. We need to also recognize, however, that while this may often be the case, there are also many instances in which our impulses come from higher aspects of our being. Examples of this would be spiritual aspirations and movements associated with this which come from the inner being, from the psychic and the subliminal. The psychic, the inner spark of the Divine in the being, and the deep inner being send up their influence to the outer nature and also drive our thoughts and actions. One may also conclude that the primary control in an individual’s life rests either with nature or with

the Divine, that the individual is either an instrument of one or the other, according to the individual’s choice or development, with sometimes a vacillating movement between the two occurring as spiritual growth advances, until the surrender to the Divine is complete and the individual is liberated from the limitations of mind and bondage to nature.

Whereas the human impulsion for knowledge and mastery might be seen as merely an urge of the lower nature for its self-aggrandizement and the fulfillment of its petty and larger desires, we can see that it has a deeper and more significant importance. Since the surface movements and actions of the being are the individual’s means of effectuation, one’s way of interacting and accomplishing in the world, one’s deeper urges and needs are expressed necessarily through the means of the surface being. Though this often occurs in distorted form, it is nevertheless symbolic of its more meaningful

form deep within, that which Sri Aurobindo describes as “the urge of Existence.” (*The Life Divine*, p. 208) As the being progresses spiritually, uniting more completely with the Divine within oneself, this deeper reality becomes increasingly what is expressed by the outer being. In light of its higher purpose, the impulsion for mastery of human existence can be regarded as serving humanity’s spiritual advance. Its quality of expression is dependent upon the consciousness within it. Sri Aurobindo tells us that the urge for true mastery serves mankind’s purpose in the world; it drives us forward to rediscover our unity with Sachchidananda. However, it is only through a change of consciousness that the urge of existence in humanity for knowledge and mastery can be fulfilled.



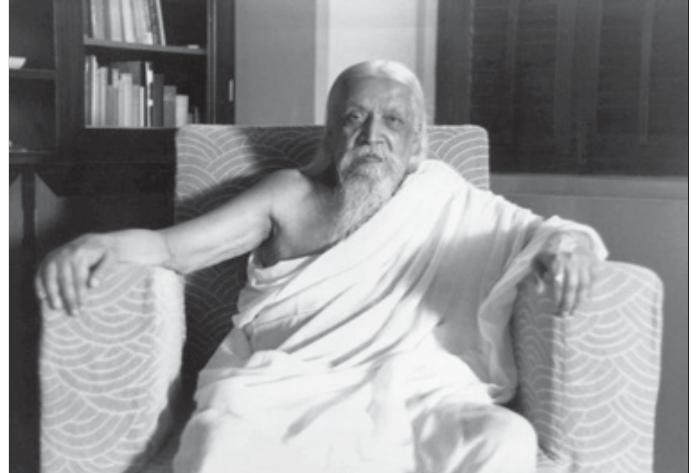
## Source material

### On faith and shakti

by Sri Aurobindo

The perfect faith is an assent of the whole being to the truth seen by it or offered to its acceptance, and its central working is a faith of the soul in its own will to be and attain and become and its idea of self and things and its knowledge, of which the belief of the intellect, the heart's consent and the desire of the life mind to possess and realise are the outward figures. This soul faith, in some form of itself, is indispensable to the action of the being and without it man cannot move a single pace in life, much less take any step forward to a yet unrealised perfection. It is so central and essential a thing that the Gita can justly say of it that whatever is a man's *oraddhâ*, that he is, *yo yacchraddhah sa eva sah*, and, it may be added, whatever he has the faith to see as possible in himself and strive for, that he can create and become. There is one kind of faith demanded as indispensable by the integral Yoga and that may be described as faith in God and the Shakti, faith in the presence and power of the Divine in us and the world, a faith that all in the world is the working of one divine Shakti, that all the steps of the Yoga, its strivings and sufferings and failures as well as its successes and satisfactions and victories are utilities and necessities of her workings and that by a firm and strong dependence on and a total self-surrender to the Divine and to his Shakti in us we can attain to oneness and freedom and victory and perfection.

The enemy of faith is doubt, and yet doubt too is a utility and necessity, because man in his ignorance and in his progressive labour towards knowledge needs to be visited by doubt, otherwise he would remain obstinate in an ignorant belief and limited knowledge and unable to escape from his errors. This utility and necessity of doubt does not altogether disappear when we enter on the path of Yoga. The integral Yoga aims at a knowledge not merely of some fundamental principle, but a knowing, a gnosis which will apply itself to and cover all life and the world action, and in this search for knowledge we enter on the way and are accompanied for many miles upon it by the mind's unregenerated activities before these are purified and transformed by a greater light: we carry with us a number of intellectual beliefs and ideas which are by no means all of them correct and perfect and a host of new ideas and suggestions meet us afterwards demanding our credence which it would be fatal to seize on and always cling to in the shape in which they come without regard to their possible error, limitation or imperfection. And indeed at one stage in the Yoga it becomes necessary to refuse to accept as definite and final any kind of intellectual idea or opinion what-



Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

ever in its intellectual form and to hold it in a questioning suspension until it is given its right place and luminous shape of truth in a spiritual experience enlightened by supramental knowledge. And much more must this be the case with the desires or impulses of the life mind, which have often to be provisionally accepted as immediate indices of a temporarily necessary action before we have the full guidance, but not always clung to with the soul's complete assent, for eventually all these desires and impulses have to be rejected or else transformed into and replaced by impulses of the divine will taking up the life movements. The heart's faith, emotional beliefs, assents are also needed upon the way, but cannot be always sure guides until they too are taken up, purified, transformed and are eventually replaced by the luminous assents of a divine Ananda which is at one with the divine will and knowledge. In nothing in the lower nature from the reason to the vital will can the seeker of the Yoga put a complete and permanent faith, but only at last in the spiritual truth, power, Ananda which become in the spiritual reason his sole guides and luminaries and masters of action.

And yet faith is necessary throughout and at every step because it is a needed assent of the soul and without this assent there can be no progress. Our faith must first be abiding in the essential truth and principles of the Yoga, and even if this is clouded in the intellect, despondent in the heart, outwearied and exhausted by constant denial and failure in the desire of the vital mind, there must be something in the innermost soul which clings and returns to it, otherwise we may fall on the path or abandon it from weakness and inability to bear temporary defeat, disappointment, difficulty and peril. In the Yoga as in life it is the man who persists unwearied to the last in the face of every defeat and disillusionment and of all confronting, hostile and contradicting events and powers who conquers in the end and finds his faith justified because to the soul and Shakti in man nothing is impossible. And even a blind and ignorant faith is a better possession



The Mother. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

than the sceptical doubt which turns its back on our spiritual possibilities or the constant carping of the narrow pettily critical uncreative intellect, *asûyâ*, which pursues our endeavour with a paralysing incertitude. The seeker of the integral Yoga must however conquer both these imperfections. The thing to which he has given his assent and set his mind and heart and will to achieve, the divine perfection of the whole human being, is apparently an impossibility to the normal intelligence, since it is opposed to the actual facts of life and will for long be contradicted by immediate experience, as happens with all far-off and difficult ends, and it is denied too by many who have spiritual experience but believe that our present nature is the sole possible nature of man in the body and that it is only by throwing off the earthly life or even all individual existence that we can arrive at either a heavenly perfection or the release of extinction. In the pursuit of such an aim there will for long be plenty of ground for the objections, the carpings, *asûyâ*, of that ignorant but persistent criticising reason which finds itself plausibly on the appearances of the moment, the stock of ascertained fact and experience, refuses to go beyond and questions the validity of all indices and illuminations that point forward; and if he yields to these narrow suggestions, he will either not arrive or be seriously hampered and long delayed in his journey. On the other hand ignorance and blindness in the faith are obstacles to a large success, invite much disappointment and disillusionment, fasten on false finalities and prevent advance to greater formulations of truth and perfection. The Shakti in her workings will strike ruthlessly at all forms of ignorance and blindness and all even that trusts wrongly and superstitiously in her, and we must be prepared to abandon a too persistent attachment to forms of faith and cling to the saving reality alone. A great and wide spiritual and intelligent faith, intelligent with the intelligence of that larger reason which assents to high possibilities, is the character of the *ûraddhâ* needed for the integral Yoga. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 743–746)

## A way to Knowledge: aspiration, imagination, and faith

by the Mother

You know, so long as you want to apply your mental, moral notions to the creation of the universe, you will never understand anything about it, never. Because from all sides and in all ways it goes beyond these conceptions—conceptions of good and evil, and these things. All the mental, moral conceptions we have cannot explain the universe. And for this part of ourselves which indeed lives in a total ignorance, all that can be said is: “Things are like that because they are like that,” one can’t explain them, because the explanations one gives are those of ignorance and explain nothing at all.

The mind explains one thing by another, this other which needs to be explained is explained by another still, and that other which needs explanation is explained by another, and if you continue in this way you can go all round the universe and return to the starting-point without having explained anything at all. (*Laughter*) So you have to pierce a hole, rise in the air and see things in another way. Then like that one can begin to understand.

*How to do it?*

How to do it? (*Laughter*)

Aspiration is like an arrow, like this (*gesture*). So you aspire, want very earnestly to understand, know, enter into the truth. Yes? And then with that aspiration you do this (*gesture*). Your aspiration rises, rises, rises, rises straight up, very strong and then it strikes against a kind of . . . how to put it? . . . lid which is there, hard like iron and extremely thick, and it does not pass through. And then you say, “See, what’s the use of aspiring? It brings nothing at all. I meet with something hard and cannot pass!” But you know about the drop of water which falls on the rock, it ends up by making a chasm: it cuts the rock from top to bottom. Your aspiration is a drop of water which, instead of falling, rises. So, by dint of rising, it beats, beats, beats, and one day it makes a hole, by dint of rising; and when it makes the hole suddenly it springs out from this lid and enters an immensity of light, and you say, “Ah, now I understand.”

It’s like that.

So one must be very persistent, very stubborn and have an aspiration which rises straight upwards, that is, which does not go roaming around here and there, seeking all kinds of things.

Only this: to understand, understand, understand, to learn to know, to be.

When one reaches the very top, there is nothing more to understand, nothing more to learn, one *is*, and it’s when one *is* that



one understands and knows.

*Mother, when one understands, what is it in us that understands?*

It's the like that knows the like. So it is only because you carry the thing in yourself that you discover it. Because you understand very well that my story is an image, don't you, that all this is an image; it corresponds quite well with something, but it's an image all the same, because one can find it as well within us as above, you see. It's only because we have physical notions about the different material planes, material dimensions; because when we understand, it is in another order of dimensions, absolutely. Now this other dimensional order does not correspond to space.

But you cannot understand and be something unless it is in you in some way or other or you are in it—it's the same thing, isn't it? However, to make you understand more easily, I can say it's because it is in you, because it's a part of your consciousness, somewhere, otherwise you could never become aware of it. If one did not carry the Divine within oneself, in the essence of one's being, one could never become aware of the Divine; it would be an impossible venture. And then if you reverse the problem, the moment you conceive and feel in some way or other, or even, to begin with, admit that the Divine is in you, as well as you are in the Divine, then already this opens the door to realization, just a little, not much—slightly ajar. Then if later the aspiration comes, the intense need to know and to be, then that intense need widens the opening until one can creep in. Then when one has crept in, one becomes aware of what he is. And that's exactly what Sri Aurobindo says, that one has forgotten, that due to this separation of Sat, Chit, Ananda [infinite existence, infinite consciousness, infinite bliss—the triune nature of the One Divine], forgetfulness comes, forgetfulness of what one is; one thinks oneself to be somebody, you see, anyone at all, a boy, a girl, a man, a woman, a dog, a horse, anything at all, a tone, the sea, the sun; one believes oneself to be all this, instead of thinking oneself the One Divine—because, in fact, if one had continued thinking oneself the One Divine, there would have been no universe at all.

That was what I wanted to tell him (*indicating a child*), that this phenomenon of separation seems to be indispensable for a universe to be there, otherwise it would always have remained as it was. But if we re-establish the unity, after having made it pass through this curve, you see, if we re-establish the unity, having benefited from the multiplicity, the division, then we have a unity of a higher quality, a unity which knows itself instead of the unity which doesn't have to know itself, for there's nothing which may know the other. When the Oneness is absolute, who can know the Oneness? We must at least be able to have an image, an appearance of something which is not it in order to understand what it is. I believe that this is the secret of the universe. Perhaps the Divine wanted really to know Himself, so He threw Himself out and then looked at Himself, and now He wants to enjoy this possibility of

being Himself with the full knowledge of Himself. This becomes much more interesting.

So there we are. Another question?

*Sweet Mother, last time you spoke about the imagination, didn't you?*

Yes.

*Then, is it through the imagination that one can realise desires or aspirations?*

That means? What exactly do you want to say? Imagining that the desire is realised and in this way help its realisation?

Yes.

Certainly, quite certainly.

*And ideals also?*

Only usually, yes, almost totally what people don't have at their disposal is the time it takes. But for instance, if you have a very powerful imagination and build up the realisation of your desire, build it up well with all its details and everything, like an admirably made formation existing in itself, totally, you see . . . well, you may be sure that if you live long enough the thing will be realised. It can be realised the next day, it can be realised the next minute, it can take years, it can take centuries. But it is sure to be realised. And then, if to this imaginative power you add a kind of creative vital strength, you make a very living force of it; and as all living forces tend towards realisation, it will put a pressure upon terrestrial events in order to be able to realise itself sooner, and it is realised.

Only, as I said, there are two things. First, as regards desires, personal circumstances, one is not very . . . persistent or very steady, and after sometime what interested you very strongly doesn't interest you any longer. You think of something else, have another desire, and make another formation. But now the first thing one imagined is very well formed; after following its curve in space it is realised. But by then the person has started another construction because for some reason or other the thing doesn't interest him any more, and his is face to face with the realisation of his first desire, while having already embarked upon the second, the third or the fourth. So his is absolutely annoyed: "But why, I don't want this any longer, why does it come?" without his being conscious that quite simply it is the result of a previous deed. If, however, instead of being desires they are aspirations for spiritual things and one continues his line with a regular progress, then one is absolutely sure to obtain one day what he has imagined. The day may be slightly far-off if there are many obstacles on the path, for example if the formation that you



have made is still very alien to the state of the earth atmosphere; well, it takes some time to prepare the conditions for its advent. But if it is something which has already been realised several times on earth and does not imply too categorical a transformation, you may have it quite quickly, provided that you follow the same line persistently. And if you add to this the adroeur of a faith and trust in the divine Grace and that kind of self-giving to the Grace which makes you expect everything from It, then it can become tremendous; you can see things being realised more and more, and the most surprising ones can be realised one after another, But for this there are conditions to be fulfilled.

One must have a great purity and a great intensity in one's self-giving, and that absolute trust in the supreme wisdom of the divine Grace, that It knows better than we do what is good for us, and all that. Then if one offers one's aspiration to It, truly gives it with enough intensity, the results are marvellous. But one must know how to see them, for when things are realised most people find it absolutely natural, they don't even see why and how it has happened, and they tell themselves, "Yes, naturally it had to be like that." So they lose the joy of . . . the joy of gratitude, because, in the last analysis, if one can be filled with gratitude and thanksgiving for the divine Grace, it puts the finishing touch, and at each step one comes to see that things are exactly what they had to be and best that could be. (*Questions and Answers*, 1955, pp. 238–241)

## Book Review

### *The Antithesis of Yoga* by Jocelyn

Reviewed by Larry Seidlitz

*This book is published by the author's Janaka Art Studio, and is available at Pondicherry, Woodstock, NY (info@pondi.biz; 845-679-2926) and at Vak, Pondicherry, India (0413-233-6672).*

**T**he *Antithesis of Yoga* is a nonfictional novel of the life of Aurovillian author Jocelyn, and her first 20 years of wonderful and terrible life in the future "City of God." The characters and drama in this 450-page book are as living and gripping as in any fictional novel. Jocelyn's writing is extraordinarily smooth, vivid, interesting, and balanced. Her excellent writing helps one overlook the occasional error in punctuation or grammar missed in copy-editing. For those interested in learning about the history of Auroville, and would like to be entertained with fascinating people and stories while doing so, this is a great book. Indeed, it is essential reading for those who want a first hand account of the tumultuous years of Auroville's early development.

Roslyn, the main character of the story who is clearly the author herself, was an American hippie searching for the "City of God." She had a vision of two eyes staring at her and heard a



*Divine family: Lord Shiva and consort Uma Maheswari, with their children Ganesh and Murugan. (Tanjore style painting by Jocelyn)*

voice, "Come to India now." Newly pregnant, she started on her journey, and her baby daughter "Bliss was born in Berlin a few days before Christmas. . . She entered the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for the first time at about 11:30 in the morning on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1969, with Bliss on one arm and a carpetbag containing all her worldly possessions on the other arm. It was a hot sunny morning."

While passing through Pondicherry, Roslyn soon met two of the most colorful characters in any fictional novel, John Kelly and Ananta. Over the next weeks, Kelly told Roslyn his story of "how he came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother," a true story. He had been an American infantryman in World War II. While hiding in a trench in France, surrounded by the corpses of his dead company, listening to the German "screaming meemies" exploding around him, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother appeared before him and spoke to him. He somehow escaped from the death surrounding him, and Sri Aurobindo continued to appear and speak to him periodically, in some instances telling him which way to run to save his life. The author, through Kelly, tells the real-life Kelly's story in exquisite detail. "I was rather annoyed with Him floating in and out of my life. He looked usually as if he was sitting in a big gray chair, and He would sail in front of me at any moment, and tell me what to do." During one of the meals over



which Kelly related his story to Roslyn, Ananta joins them at their table, and we are introduced to his no less remarkable life.

Ananta, for those of you not already familiar with him, came from a wealthy and powerful Boston family, and became, one might say, the “black sheep.” Here we are treated to a number of hilarious stories about this hard-drinking mystic who, we are told, traveled for three years in the Himalayas as a Sadhu, and was initiated into Tantric occultism. He had gone to Pondicherry in 1953 to get a ferry to visit his Tantric guru in Sri Lanka, and while there he visited the Ashram. He arranged to meet the Mother, and at their first meeting she took him out to an island and asked him to live there and build a temple. This he did and Roslyn would often visit him there. Monthly, he would perform pujas (ritual offerings) to various forgotten but living deities—Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, Apollo, and other gods.

Like Ananta, Roslyn also had stopped in Pondicherry only to rest before traveling on to Sri Lanka. She had had a wonderful time in Pondicherry and met many interesting people. She had contacted the Mother, who had invited her to visit after she returned from Sri Lanka. Roslyn had not intended to return to Pondicherry, but having received the Mother’s invitation, decided to return. On the way to Sri Lanka, she stopped in Rameshwaram at the southern tip of India, where she was to take a boat to Sri Lanka. She missed the boat, which would not return for three days, so decided to go to the Sri Aurobindo Nilayam, and visit the Tantric yogi, Panditji, whom she had been told about. He received her warmly, and she felt something from him, “Suddenly it was as though a cloud or a limitation within her melted like ice in the sun; her whole being felt suddenly freed, and waves of bliss as gentle as the warm surf on the beach filled her.” He asked her if she would like to take up a spiritual practice, and she agreed. The author vividly describes Panditji’s home, his pujas, the dusty village where he lives, and the great temple located there —“the corridors were magnificent, and every inch different, carved, painted, with huge monoliths”—where Panditji had practiced tapasya alone for 12 years.

The focus of this book, however, is clearly on Auroville. After returning to Pondicherry and meeting Mother, Roslyn had become captivated by Auroville. “For Roslyn, Auroville was more real than Pondicherry, or any other place she had ever been. It did not matter that it was really a few huts on a piece of wasteland pockmarked with impoverished villages. For her it was a place where there were other people sharing the same inner vision that had guided her to India. This inner life and its demands had guided her, and she was very grateful that she had found a place which aspired to be what her soul was seeking.”

Auroville during the early years was not an easy place, and Roslyn had a harder time than most. Indeed she was not welcome when she first tried to move into Aspiration, Auroville’s largest community made up mostly of French people. She returned to Pondicherry for a period at the Mother’s instructions. There she met other people, including some Americans who lived in Auroville. Then on 28 February 1970, Auroville’s second birthday,

Roslyn went to Auroville with some friends from Pondicherry for the birthday meditation at dawn.

After the meditation was over, a man came over to Roslyn and Bliss, asking why everyone was piling back into their cars and buses. “This is only the beginning of the meditation. This is Auroville. This is Auroville’s birthday.” Roslyn asked him whether it is possible to live there, and he said “certainly,” and showed her an empty hut “not far from the Banyan on the dusty plain.” Thus began Roslyn’s Auroville adventure.

An important theme running throughout the novel is Roslyn’s relationship with a handsome, Harvard-educated, wealthy man. He had met Roslyn’s sister who had come for a visit and was staying at the same guest house as he was in Pondicherry. Roslyn meets him when he is invited for lunch together with Roslyn.

“There was a flash of white, and the most handsome human being in the world was bent over Roslyn’s outstretched hand, that had somehow met his hand in space. She looked into eyes that seemed to tell the story of every spring forever. He was saying, ‘You must be the terrible sister who lives in a hut in Auroville.’

“‘And who are you?’ she gasped.

“‘James Anthony Drummond Bean IV,’ he replied. ‘May I escort you in to lunch?’ . . . Lunch might have been paper for all she noticed of the food as she swallowed it. He became her Ice Cream Jim.”

Jim soon became a dedicated Aurovillian who financed many projects. He is a central character in the drama, a close friend of Roslyn’s. An interesting feature of the book is that each chapter begins with an excerpt from “Jim Bean’s Journal Extracts from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Synthesis of Yoga*.” These consist of summaries of important points—quotes, paraphrases, and interpretations—from the text, and provide a philosophical background to the story. Another nice feature of the book is that we are given glimpses of the Mother in her meetings and exchanges with Roslyn.

At her parent’s request, Roslyn flew back to the United States in October 1973. After visiting her parents, she headed out in an old station wagon given by her father to San Francisco. Enroute, Roslyn heard of Mother’s passing: “Roslyn did not know whether to use her plane ticket and go back to India to be with Jim Bean, or to continue on to San Francisco. She had received blessings from The Mother before she left Pondicherry to begin a community in California—Auroville West. Mother had said the second city of Auroville would be in Northern California. Roslyn decided to go on to California.”

There begins another adventure of extraordinary meetings with extraordinary people. Roslyn would spend over two years in California, and there seemed to be a force working towards the formation of Auroville West. She met a variety of colorful people: Frankie and Suzanne, who “had grown up in neighboring castles in the South of France;” Billy Skylar and



his friend Lou, both of whom had met Mother, and with whose blessings had started Skyar's Ranch in Sonoma County, where "nearly a hundred families of happy hippies had settled . . . in rough shelters independent of any building codes," but which was later closed by the authorities; Saschwa, a medium and healer who had also met the Mother, had a group of followers registered as "The Church of the Gentle Brothers and Sisters, and whose face seemed to dissolve while Roslyn meditated with him, and "for a moment it was Mother sitting there in front of her." There were also others who were interested in starting a new community together with the others, including one "seriously wealthy" man whose house "was as large as a small hotel . . . The master bathroom was larger and had more space in than most houses." The connections developed one after another, but after some time, Roslyn returned to Auroville, where a conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society was brewing.

The author relates the history of the conflict from the point of view of a "neutral," one who did not take sides in the conflict, but who in turn was considered an enemy by both sides. Her perspective seems fairly objective, at least, it points out faults in both sides, and casts a first-hand account of the plight of the neutrals. The story is told only partly through historical commentary on the situation; it is told primarily through historical incidents, through the life experiences of individuals taking part in the drama, and through letters that at the time were circulated in Auroville by Victor, a central character in the drama who bears a striking resemblance to Satprem.

Around this time two accidents occurred. In the first, a young boy, Auro, fell into an open well that was being dug, which had about a half-meter of water at the bottom, and drowned. A little later, Dhyana, the child's mother and a close friend of Roslyn's, was working high up on the Matrimandir, Mother's temple, and fell.

Victor wrote to the community regarding the latter accident. In his letter, he said: "As regards that accident, each one must find its cause in himself, and his individual shortcomings. It is the real cause, the general condition of the community, not any single individual or group. All are equally responsible. . . Auroville must fight the falsehood of internal division."

Victor took great interest in Dhyana's recovery. He visited her at the hospital regularly. A group of attendants was formed to look after her. He believed that her recovery was central to the work of the Supramental manifestation in Auroville. Jim Bean had already become involved in Dhyana's care immediately after the accident, paying all the hospital bills and instructing that no ex-

pense be spared. Roslyn, upon her return to Auroville, also visited Dhyana regularly, but at Dhyana's request, was not part of the team attending to her.

The community became more divisive and hostile. Victor's pronouncements, aimed at creating a unity among Aurovillians, created instead divisiveness and a climate hostile to any alternative viewpoint. Vasudeva had been appointed by the Mother as her secretary for Auroville. Vasudeva had supported Auroville in its struggle to become independent of the Sri Aurobindo Society, and helped to set up the Matrimandir Fund, which was used to support Aurovillians in the void left from the discontinued support from the Sri Aurobindo Society. The author explained: "Now the community felt that they should no longer accept support from Vasudeva and The Matrimandir Fund, because Vasudeva said that Auroville should not ask the Government of India to involve itself in the battle against the Sri Aurobindo Society."

But the community did not simply reject Vasudeva's help. "Shunning was practiced by the community of those who had earned the collective displeasure. It was a time of confusion. The

community refused to process the visas of those who had for one reason or another been declared 'outcast.' Most of the outcasts had originally been accepted by the Mother into Auroville, and had

simply refused to stop speaking to Vasudeva. Their Pour Tous baskets [their support from the community] had been discontinued. The community did not recommend their visas. Anyone speaking to them was in danger of becoming an outcast also." Roslyn was declared an outcast, and her situation deteriorated.

*She did not speak to anyone. No one spoke to her . . . All the people she had known since the beginning of Auroville ignored her . . . She was struggling. There were days each month when there was nothing to eat . . . She felt more alone than anyone who ever lived. She wondered how long it would take her to die of starvation.*

Roslyn was rescued from her immediate crisis when an Australian named Tas, together with his girlfriend, Kwan Yin, invited her to tea. The couple were making crocheted shoes and selling them, and having heard of Roslyn's good craftsmanship, asked her to join them. They made beautiful crocheted shoes in every color, and had a beautiful line of hand-stitched leather bags. They contributed some of their earnings to Auroville. However, their relationship with Auroville was marginal, and with time deteriorated. The community became openly hostile, both to Roslyn

*She did not speak to anyone. No one spoke to her . . . All the people she had known since the beginning of Auroville ignored her . . . She was struggling. There were days each month when there was nothing to eat . . . She felt more alone than anyone who ever lived.*



and to anyone associated with her. Jim Bean and Dhyana, as well as many of her other friends, had stopped speaking to her. Tas and Kwan Yin left Auroville, and Roslyn was left alone with the responsibilities of the business, which was hamstrung by the community.

Then “on 5 November 1982, the Supreme Court of India declared that the Auroville Act, passed by the Parliament of India, placing Auroville under the management of an Administrator appointed by the Government’s Department of Education for three to five years, did not contravene the Indian Constitution, and should be immediately enforced.” Roslyn, and every other Aurovillian, was given a paper to sign declaring that the assets, land, buildings, businesses, were all relateable to Auroville and under the management of the Government of India. The Government, through its Administrator, would decide how the assets would be maintained in the future and by whom. For the most part the Administrator appointed the same people responsible for handling the assets who had been handling them previously; however, in some cases he appointed extra co-executives, in others “he just dismissed the management and appointed new management. He took Vasudeva’s daughter’s workshop and gave it to an Italian man. Roslyn was worried that he would give her workshop, forest, and mango grove to someone else . . .” After asking advice, she signed the paper and gave it to the Administrator. He said that because there was objection to her presence in Auroville, he would appoint a co-executive to help manage her assets.

That night, as she slept in her bed, Roslyn was attacked: “Pow! Smash! Someone had knocked out her teeth! She did not open her eyes to try to see who it was, but put her hands over them to protect them from the rain of ringing blows with a blunt instrument that followed. Whack! Whack! Whack! The blows fell on her hands, arms, head, in a seemingly never-ending horror of torment, beyond her wildest dreams.”

Roslyn, soaked in blood, managed to go to a neighbor, who had not been unfriendly. They helped clean the blood from her body and get her fresh clothes. At first light, they took her to the Ashram Nursing Home where she was given a pain killer and made as comfortable as possible. People who had heard what had happened started showing up, some who had not said a word to her for years. The Ashram doctor came, on his birthday, assembled a team of doctors, and performed surgery. It lasted four hours. Roslyn chose to stay awake. There was a large photo of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the operation room, and Roslyn concentrated on her mantra. The next morning Roslyn looked into a mirror for the first time: “She looked too horrible to be human.”

“After two weeks in the nursing home, Roslyn felt she was ready to go back to the forest. She had to go back. She had nowhere else to go.”

Roslyn struggled at her business, and somehow things slowly moved forward. “She had stopped giving goods on credit, and demanded payment for any goods before they left the workshop. She had a talented group of craftspeople whose abilities comple-



*Kalachakra: the Tantric Tibetan Buddhist concept of the big bang, the beginning of time. (Painting by Jocelyn)*

mented one another. She had a cupboard full of beautiful leather garments, bags, shoes and accessories.”

One afternoon, while visiting a friend, Roslyn ran into Yvonne, an associate of Mr. Lala, a wealthy industrialist who had given several large grants to Auroville. They recognized each other as having met about 10 years earlier, the first time Yvonne had come to Auroville. Yvonne explained that Mr. Lala asked her to visit Auroville to look into the situation of the neutrals, and she seemed genuinely interested in helping. Yvonne was interested in Roslyn and her work, and Roslyn took her on her motorcycle to show her the workshop and take her around Auroville. While bumping into several friends, Yvonne witnessed first-hand the animosity towards and shunning of Roslyn by various members of the community, and was shocked to tears.

With Yvonne’s help, the community agreed that the neutrals could apply for reentry into the community on an individual basis. Roslyn reenters as a Newcomer, and after a one-year probationary period, was allowed back into the mainstream community. Although many people still would not speak to her, her handicraft



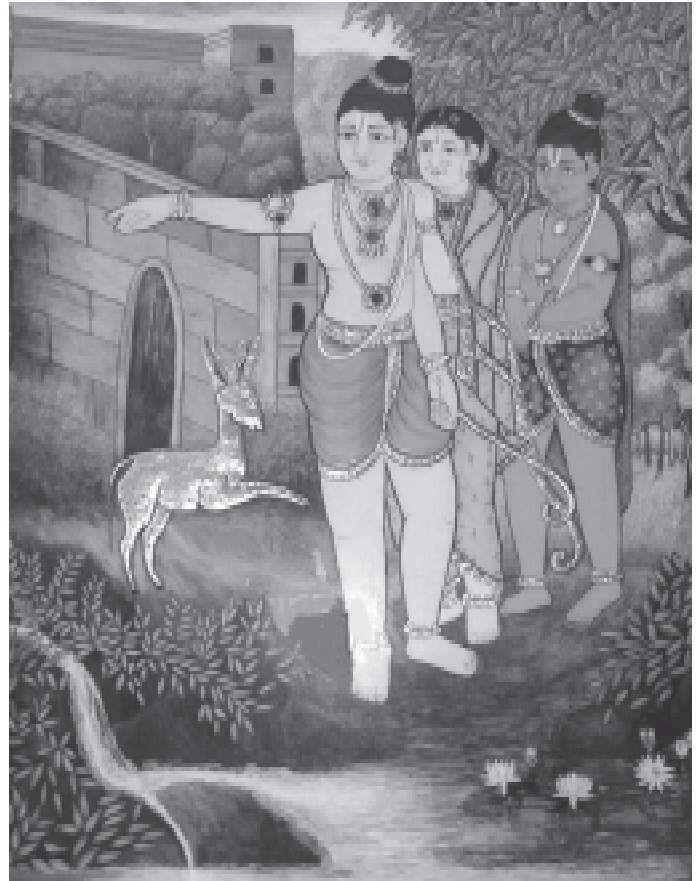
unit became officially part of the Handicraft Trust. Her business flourished and she began selling products in markets locally and all over the world. She also became involved in community meetings and planning.

After a time, Roslyn heard that Bean Jim was unwell. She tried to get information on his health, but there was a great secrecy surrounding him. People who would come to visit or help were turned away by Dhyana and other attendants, who would say that after Jim was better they could visit him. As time went on, there were hints that Jim was seriously ill, but he still did not go to a hospital or get professional medical treatment. Roslyn began having recurring dreams of Jim in which he was crying for help. She tried to visit him and spoke of her dreams to his attendant, but was turned away and reassured that Jim was not seeking help. After some time, Roslyn heard that Jim Bean had died. On the night of his death, Dhyana took poison and also died.

At first, Roslyn's outward life continued unchanged, though within she was struggling and seeking to understand these deaths and Auroville in general. Then one day, Roslyn's friends from California, Frankie and She, arrived in a taxi at her home. She invited Roslyn to stay with her in California for a time. Roslyn was feeling ready to leave Auroville forever, and accepted the offer. Both She and Roslyn had been living alone for about 10 years, and immensely enjoyed each other's company. Roslyn loved living in California and did not want to return to India. After about two years, Roslyn had a dream in which Jim Bean told her to come and live in his house in Auroville. In the morning, Roslyn saw the Mother while meditating and the Mother told her it was time for her to go back to Auroville. A few minutes later the phone rang; it was She telling Roslyn it was time for her to go back to Auroville.

Roslyn returned, and was told there is no place for her to stay in Auroville. She felt that she was returning to the battlefield. She again saw Jim Bean's ghost telling her to go to the house he had built. She went to all the guesthouses, but they were all full. Finally, she went to Jim Bean's house, which was also a guesthouse. "It was dirty, empty, and depressing. It had the atmosphere of a bus station." The caretaker, who lived in hut nearby, said she could rent a room, but she would have to leave in a few months because the house had been rented for a five-year program in environmental education. She was not to complain about the dirt, if she didn't like it she could leave. As she had no place else to go, she shut up. After a time, the contract with the environmental program was cancelled. Then the caretaker moved away because someone gave him a house elsewhere in Auroville. Then the community agreed that Roslyn should have the house.

Under Roslyn's care, the house became clean and beautiful, a repository of Auroville arts and crafts, which she felt Jim would have done. She felt it was an honor to look after the house. "Roslyn realized for herself there was nothing to do but to be happy and grateful. But she was in Auroville, and she was still alive, so she tried to participate also in the collective process. She did not want to release her ego to do battle with other egos. She was



*From the Ramayana: Lord Rama, with his consort Sita and Rama's brother, Lakshman. Marison, relative of the demon Ravana, is disguised as a deer. (Thanjore style painting by Jocelyn)*

so happy and grateful she wanted to try to be a person living in Auroville, as a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness."

This bare-bones synopsis perhaps gives the reader a sense of the content and progression of the book, but it does not convey it in the exquisite vividness and detail that the author does. Most of the many characters in the book are painted by Jocelyn in living colors. The places in which the story takes place—the barren clay and canyons of Auroville's early days, the lush forests of its later days, the streets of Pondicherry, the Ashram, the villages of India, the California coast—all become vibrant, tangible, and real under the author's pen. The events of the story, including those comprising the conflict in Auroville, a few of which are summarized in this brief synopsis, take on an immediacy and the tension or peace, intimacy or hate of real encounters. Jocelyn gives a dynamic feel for the drama which has taken place in Auroville, both its darkest turns and its brightest promises, and it is done without holding punches, without bitterness, and with both gratitude and hope. The author, through her own personal ordeal, has clearly done much soul-searching and reflection to make sense of it all, and in this wonderful book she conveys to the reader her insights and hard-won wisdom and understanding.



## *The poetry room*

### **From *Savitri*: The yoga of the king**

A Will, a hope immense now seized his heart,  
And to discern the superhuman's form  
He raised his eyes to unseen spiritual heights,  
Aspiring to bring down a greater world.  
The glory he had glimpsed must be his home.  
A brighter heavenlier sun must soon illumine  
This dusk room with its dark internal stair,  
The infant soul in its small nursery school  
Mid objects meant for a lesson hardly learned  
Outgrow its early grammar of intellect  
And its imitation of Earth-Nature's art,  
Its earthly dialect to God-language change,  
In living symbols study Reality  
And learn the logic of the Infinite.  
The Ideal must be Nature's common truth,  
The body illumined with the indwelling God,  
The heart and mind feel one with all that is,  
A conscious soul live in a conscious world.  
As through a mist a sovereign peak is seen,  
The greatness of the eternal Spirit appeared,  
Exiled in a fragmented universe  
Amid half-semblances of diviner things.  
These now could serve no more his regal turn;  
The Immortal's pride refused the doom to live  
A miser of the scanty bargain made  
Between our littleness and bounded hopes  
And the compassionate Infinitudes.  
His height repelled the lowness of earth's state:  
A wideness discontented with its frame  
Resiled from poor assent to Nature's terms,  
The harsh contract spurned and the diminished lease.  
Only beginnings are accomplished here;  
Our base's Matter seems alone complete,  
An absolute machine without a soul.  
Or all seems a misfit of half ideas,  
Or we saddle with the vice of earthly form  
A hurried imperfect glimpse of heavenly things,  
Guesses and travesties of celestial types.  
Here chaos sorts itself into a world,  
A brief formation drifting in the void:  
Apings of knowledge, unfinished arcs of power,  
Flamings of beauty into earthly shapes,  
Love's broken reflexes of unity  
Swim, fragment-mirrorings of a floating sun.  
A packed assemblage of crude tentative lives  
Are pieced into a tessellated whole.

There is no perfect answer to our hopes;  
There are blind voiceless doors that have no key;  
Thought climbs in vain and brings a borrowed light,  
Cheated by counterfeits sold to us in life's mart,  
Our hearts clutch at a forfeited heavenly bliss.  
There is provender for the mind's satiety,  
There are thrills of the flesh, but not the soul's desire.  
Here even the highest rapture Time can give  
Is a mimicry of ungrasped beatitudes,  
A mutilated statue of ecstasy,  
A wounded happiness that cannot live,  
A brief felicity of mind or sense  
Thrown by the World-Power to her body-slave,  
Or a simulacrum of enforced delight  
In the seraglios of Ignorance.  
For all we have acquired soon loses worth,  
An old disvalued credit in Time's bank,  
Imperfection's cheque drawn on the Inconscient.  
An inconsequence dogs every effort made,  
And chaos waits on every cosmos formed:  
In each success a seed of failure lurks.  
He saw the doubtfulness of all things here,  
The incertitude of man's proud confident thought,  
The transience of the achievements of his force.  
A thinking being in an unthinking world,  
An island in the sea of the Unknown,  
He is a smallness trying to be great,  
An animal with some instincts of a god,  
His life a story too common to be told,  
His deeds a number summing up to nought,  
His consciousness a torch lit to be quenched,  
His hope a star above a cradle and grave.  
And yet a greater destiny may be his,  
For the eternal Spirit is his truth.  
He can re-create himself and all around  
And fashion new the world in which he lives:  
He, ignorant, is the Knower beyond Time,  
He is the Self above Nature, above Fate.  
(*Savitri*, pp. 76–78)

—Sri Aurobindo



## Haimavati

Like the shimmering snowflakes  
Thou art, oh Haimavati;  
Thou, deity eternal,  
Thou art thy own Grace.  
Tenderly dawning in the hearts  
Of those who seek Thee,  
Like snowflakes soft Thou tread  
Into the heart of the seeker.  
Oh Haima, Thy rose-pink hue  
Emanates in the glow of a radiance  
That captures the soul of Thy devotees  
Who hold Thy lotus feet in their bosom,  
Forsaking every other object  
Of the world for Thy appearance  
In the horizon of their domain.  
Make their hearts tremble with awe  
And expectancy for they know not  
Thy grace that Thou bestow  
On those who seek Thee true.  
The unique one who adored Thee  
Dwells in the bosom of eternity.  
Oh Goddess, art Thou more happy to see  
Thy seekers on earth or in the vast Beyond  
In Timeless and spaceless eternity?  
Surely Thou love them more  
When earth is their abode,  
For, earth for Thee is a play of  
The Divine, the power supreme.  
Bless us, Oh Goddess,  
With Thy eternally blissful energy  
That manifests in creativity  
Ever anew.

—Susmita Chatterjee

*Author's note: Haimavati is the great deity of divine creativity. We find her reference in the Kena Upanishad, which is a unique text that tells about the divine bliss that we all long for. Haimavati is the deity that leads mankind to this divine bliss. Guru Anirvan is a devotee of Goddess Haimavati who is his Ishta Devi.*

## Irumbai temple

Irumbai resounds with the fervour  
Reaching through the magic wand of eve  
And a cornice lit by a lamp,  
To the hidden marvel of soul;  
Children and women and men and youth  
In a deeper sense and symbol speech,  
Wash the picturesque scene.

Gone through welcoming gates  
Of colourful kolam and flowery softness,  
A breath of difference and surprise,  
A sense of wonder and joy  
Adorns the courtyard's compelling ease.

Aloft the musical strains that come  
From a Shahnai's sonorous enchantment  
And the rolling ability of fingers  
Working the rapid beats of a mridanga,  
An attraction of soul-entrancing melodies  
Decorates their vibrations 'pon the ear.

Alight with crevice-placed lamps,  
The temple of Shiva and Ganesh;  
A vision opens and one sees;  
The semblance of things old  
That is the timeless nexus  
Tying us to a cornerstone assembly  
Wherein our greater soul revels,  
Garners these moments sublime.

This Irumbai temple, this place  
Windowed-in by spacious paddy and field,  
Large adornments of the country-side,  
Wears the carven majesty of the rural world,  
While rock-hewn images of gods and beings  
Aloft the temple's dome, gaze out  
As if from planes of life and mind.

—Vigyan Agni

## Dark face

“Had I but searched well  
I might have glimpsed Thy Face.”  
Thus self-reproach's bitter refrain  
Poisons my life and saddens me.  
My glittering joys console me not,  
I have squandered my brief time  
Striving for the honours of the world.  
Ah, thy enchantment eludes me,



Thy Sun-head, resplendent in golden curls,  
Missed while passing on its eternal way  
My caravan of unfulfilled days.  
Inscribing their ineffective tale on failure's page,  
They leave me cold, this world's pale grandeurs.  
O beguile me not, test me not so hard!  
These mantras, icons and rosaries  
Are but my child's effort to hold in two tiny hands  
The Infinite and Intangible!  
O Comrade, O Love, ever dark are Thy ways,  
Dark as the marvel of Thy Face.  
For a soul-moment let me stray  
Into the valley of sunflowers  
And gather a magic spray  
To golden my life's grey.

—Shyam Kumari

### **I feel you are not far**

Fill me with thee, break out in wideness  
Pierce through this crust, this brittle shell.  
Enough these long months, these years that stretch  
In slow growth towards brief glimmerings!  
Must I always crawl by inches?  
Must I always deceive myself?  
Let true love, true self-giving bloom!  
Let me see only thee in all –  
Let the charade end, the masks fall!  
Caress me in the boons of love,  
And strike me with the blows of fate.  
Be with me in the labor long,  
And kiss me with the breeze of eve.  
Silence this closed circle of thought  
That shuts thee out, that turns around,  
Turns endlessly, inching ahead,  
Planning by steps the foot in front.  
Open the skies that see forever,  
That carry the future on wings  
Of warm golden peace gliding swiftly,  
Steadily through the vast expanse.  
Dissolve this dull unfeeling lull.  
Burn through this haze, O Sun of Force!  
Explode in thy blinding white light,  
Thy fiery bite of fierce delight.  
Fuel the flames of my aspiration  
With thy power of infinite might.  
Unleash thy fury that destroys  
The darkness, the adversary,  
That hides in the depths and holds me  
Back, back from your glorious sight.

—Larry Seidlitz

### **A dream or a Reality**

An infinite dwells in my heart;  
Diverse though the world is,  
I am awakened with a dream  
Of oneness and harmony.

An infinite has come to dwell  
In my heart, and an overflowing  
Love has quenched my thirst.  
Oh infinite, thou art not only outside,  
Silent and sequestered;  
Deep in my heart in secrecy  
Thy adventure goes on and on—  
Merging into one the outer  
And inner, night and day, birth  
And death, as if pearls strung on  
An endless chain of existence, in  
The unawakened dream of earth.

—Susmita Chatterjee

### **A tryst**

Quietly I tried to slide down  
The hidden paths of Thy Peace,  
But like a hundred courtesans  
Thoughts enchanted and enranged me.  
Avidly I listened to their fascinating tales  
At first so important; gradually they grew stale.  
Satiated I tried to plunge  
Into the plumbless depths of my soul,  
But the dance of the nimble nymphs of life  
Kept hidden the inner doors.  
I have a tryst with my true self;  
In an expectant hush my bride is waiting.  
She has lighted an eternal lamp —  
Peerless the reflections of her beauty.  
Tears fall from the luminous pools of her eyes,  
As at my hapless wanderings she sighs,  
Yet her love abides.  
Again I try to find the way,  
But get entangled in the overgrowths of life.  
O my Dawn! Arise and flood the faltering darkness  
With the rivers of your radiance.  
On your million rays bear me away  
From the mirage of mind and life.

—Shyam Kumari



## Apropos

All should be done quietly from within—working, speaking, reading, writing as part of the real consciousness—not with the dispersed and unquiet movement of the ordinary consciousness. —Sri Aurobindo

To keep steady one's aspiration and to look at oneself with an absolute sincerity are the sure means to overcome all obstacles. —The Mother

It is better by noble boldness to run the risk of being subject to half the evils we anticipate than to remain in cowardly listlessness for fear of what might happen. —Herodotus

But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught. —Isha Upanishad

The shortest and surest way to live with honor in the world is to be in reality what we would appear to be. —Socrates

The best way of meeting difficulties is a quiet and calm confidence in the Grace. —The Mother

Keep firm faith in the victory of the Light and face with calm equanimity the resistances of Matter and human personality to their own transformation. —Sri Aurobindo

Most of the major ills of the world have been caused by well-meaning people who ignored the principle of individual freedom, except as applied to themselves, and who were obsessed with fanatical zeal to improve the lot of mankind. —Henry Grady Weaver

The work an unknown good man has done is like a vein of water flowing hidden underground, secretly making the ground green. —Thomas Carlyle

That moves and That moves not; That is far and the same is near; That is within all this and That also is outside all this. —Isha Upanishad

Always be kind and you will be free from suffering, always be contented and happy, and you will radiate your quiet happiness. —The Mother

I know of treasure that is not for ever; for not by things unstable shall one attain That One which is stable; therefore I heaped the fire of Nachiketas, and by the sacrifice of transitory things I won the Eternal. —Katha Upanishad

I am a part of all that I have met; yet all experience is an arch where-through gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades forever and forever when I move. —Tennyson

The aspiration must be intense, calm and strong . . . and not restless and impatient, — then alone it can be stable. —Sri Aurobindo

When we have reached what in this world is good, that which is better is labelled a fraud, a blind. What gave us life, feelings of highest worth, go dead amidst the maddening crowds of earth. —Goethe

An inferior man cannot tell you of Him; for thus told thou canst not truly know Him, since He is thought of in many aspects. Yet unless told of Him by another thou canst not find thy way there to Him; for He is subtler than subtlety and that which logic cannot reach. —Katha Upanishad

All men are equal in their birth, heirs of the earth and skies; All men are equal when that earth fades from their dying eyes. —Harriet Martineau

Happy the man who swamped in this sea of Error still hopes to struggle up through the watery wall; What we don't know is exactly what we need and what we know fulfils no need at all. —Goethe

One thing is the good and quite another thing is the pleasant, and both seize upon a man with different meanings. Of these whoso takes the good, it is well with him; he falls from the aim of life who chooses the pleasant. —Katha Upanishad

The rough handling and careless breaking or waste and misuse of physical things is a denial of the yogic consciousness and a great hindrance to the bringing down of the Divine Truth to the material plane. —Sri Aurobindo

The more money one has, the more one is in a state of calamity . . . Yes, it is a calamity. —The Mother

The habit of persistence is the habit of victory. —Herbert Kaufman

We have to have the faith that in spite of our ignorance and errors and weaknesses and in spite of the attacks of hostile forces and in spite of any immediate appearance of failure the Divine Will is leading us, through every circumstance, towards the final Realisation. —Sri Aurobindo

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting: The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, hath had elsewhere its setting, and cometh from afar. —Wordsworth

To recognize one's weaknesses and false movements and draw back from them is the way towards liberation. —Sri Aurobindo

There is no greater mystery than this, that we keep seeking reality though in fact we are reality. —Sri Ramana Maharshi

We are afraid to learn because we are afraid to grow and to assume the greater responsibility that goes with growth. —Tarthang Tulku

A spiritual atmosphere is more important than outer conditions; if one can get that and also create one's own spiritual air to breathe in and live in it, that is the true condition of progress. —Sri Aurobindo