

Collaboration

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Dakshina Vanzetti, Michael Miovic & John Robert Cornell on the Yoga in America
• Reviews of books by Sraddhalu Ranade and Nishikanta
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry • Apropos



About the cover

Light streams into a redwood grove shrouded in fog. (Photo courtesy www.wikipedia.org)

The authors and poets

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Nishikanta (1909-1973) was a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1934 until his passing. He wrote 10 books of Bengali poetry and his poetry was highly regarded by Sri Aurobindo and other poets and sadhaks in the Ashram.

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From the office of Collaboration

The artists and photographers

Karen Cornell (kcornell@cal.net) finds her way walking in nature and drawing its beauty. She is an office manager and graphic artist specializing in pencil, pen and ink, and watercolor.

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In this issue we continue on the theme started last issue on the Yoga in America. Last time we presented the experiences of three individuals practicing the yoga in the United States. This time we first present an interview with Dakshina Vanzetti of Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP) in Lodi, California, in which she discusses activities both at the center and around the country. In addition to SASP activities, she discusses her perceptions of the AUM conferences, the coordination of various centers around the country, and the various opportunities and challenges of practicing the yoga in America. This interview is timely as soon SASP will be receiving and installing Sri Aurobindo's Relics at the center (see the note under "Briefs" on the following page).

This interview is followed by two complementary essays by Michael Miovic and John Robert Cornell about the soul of America, the characteristic qualities and tendencies of its people. These two visionaries and thinkers have come to similar conclusions about the nature of the American psyche and its uniquely characteristic approach to spirituality and the Divine. Inspired by a passage from Sri Aurobindo, Michael considers these qualities in the context of an original and perceptive analysis of a correspondence between the seven chakras and the continents of the earth. He finds that America corresponds to the *muladhara* chakra, the center of the physical consciousness. He presents a thoughtful and convincing analysis of American culture that demonstrates America's strong and unmistakable expression of the physical consciousness in domains ranging from its love of the outdoors to its language, writing, music, art, and industry.

John Robert Cornell follows up on this theme by examining America's relationship to nature and the land. Here we learn about the thriving genre of nature writing in America, as well as about the American Indians and their entry into the mystical realm through and behind the physical environment. He helps us to get back into contact with nature, and with our deeper self which is strongly based in nature. We begin to see the unique character of the American approach to spirituality and Integral Yoga, and the complementary importance of Integral Yoga to the fulfillment of the American spiritual quest.

We follow these essays with a short article by Krishnaraj Daffe on the history and aims of World Union, an organization started in 1958 under the inspiration of Sri Aurobindo's writings. The Mother herself became the President of the organization in 1964, and a number of influential people have guided its activities over the last 50 years. Now, under the new stewardship of the author, it is reorganizing itself and seeking a new direction for the future, which is broadly sketched out in this article. This essay, and the two essays that follow in Source Material by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, also bear on the topic of the Yoga in America, and serve to put it into broader perspective.

In Current Affairs, we have a remembrance of Dr. Nadkarni, and present details on the Relics installation at the Lodi ashram, and the upcoming AUM conference in Colorado. In AV Almanac we have a report on the upcoming 40th anniversary celebrations of Auroville. In Book Reviews, we have reviews of Sraddhalu Ranade's book on Integral Education, and two books of poetry by Nishakanta, translated by Satadal. We present a selection of these poems in the Poetry Room, and close with a set of inspiring quotations.

Corrections: In the last issue (Fall 2007, Vol. 32, No. 2), there were two errors in the biographical notes about the authors:

Anie Nunnally's email address should have been listed as aniemere@comcast.net.

The note for James Anderson should have stated that NAMAHA, the journal for which he works on the editorial staff, focuses on the subject of integral health and healing.

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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.

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Current Affairs

Passing of Mangesh V. Nadkarni

by Larry Seidlitz

Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni, widely known for his talks on *Savitri* in India, the U.S., and the Far East, passed away at his home in Pondicherry on 23 September 2007 after a heart attack. He was 74 years old.

In recent years, Dr. Nadkarni was perhaps best known for his talks on *Savitri* and *Essays on the Gita* held during darshan times at the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry, which were well-attended. Here he would explain Sri Aurobindo's difficult poetry and philosophy in layman's terms, slowly working through the books over the years. He also organized seminars for the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry in which invited members throughout India learned about the Masters' teachings.

Dr. Nadkarni also was a frequent speaker at venues throughout India, including the annual camps at Nainital, organized by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch. He lived in Singapore for eight years between 1984 and 1992, and was a well-loved and central figure in the active Sri Aurobindo Center there, where he gave weekly talks and initiated the Center's weekly group-walks. He was also well-known in the U.S. where he had visited and given talks at the major centers on both the East and West Coasts, as well as being a keynote speaker at the 1998 AUM conference in Connecticut. He also published many articles in various journals related to the Yoga, including *Collaboration*, as well as two books, *Savitri: A brief introduction* and *India's spiritual destiny*, both of which were based on his talks. Despite the adulation he received, he was very warm and personable.

Dr. Nadkarni was born on 6 March 1933 in Kodibagh, in the Indian state of Karnataka along the Arabian Sea. His parents lived in the nearby village of Bankikodla. He received a B.A. in English from Rajaram College at Kolhapur and an M.A. in English from Pune University in 1956. Afterwards, he took up a job as lecturer of English in Commerce College at Rajkot, and in 1959 joined Nalini and Arvin Arts College in Gujarat. In 1962 he was chosen by his college to study English in the Central Institute of English at Hyderabad and was offered a job in the same Institute in 1963. This Institute sent him to the University of California, Los Angeles on a scholarship, where he received a Ph.D. in Linguistics in 1970. After graduation, he returned to India where he worked for the Central Institute of English at Osmania University in Hyderabad until 1984. Even during this period he used to give weekly talks at the Sri Aurobindo Center in Hyderabad. In 1984, Dr. Nadkarni was appointed as Professor of English in the National University of Singapore, where he worked until his retirement in 1992.



Dr. Nardkarni speaking at Sri Aurobindo Society Singapore Centre in 2005. (Photo by Shashi Lal Kashyap)

Dr. Nadkarni had his first darshan of the Mother in 1956. After his marriage to Mira Mallapur in 1961, he and his wife came to the Ashram and had the darshan of the Mother on her terrace. In 1966, they went together to the Mother and received blessings directly from her. When they returned to India from Singapore in 1992 they first lived in Hyderabad. They would visit Pondicherry during the four darshan periods and then settled in Pondicherry in 2003. They regularly traveled to the U.S. to visit their daughters, Nandita Koppikar and Sucheta Oley, and their families.

Briefs

Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham is deeply happy to announce the Enshrinement of the sacred Relics of Sri Aurobindo on 19 April 2008 at their center located at 2621 W. Hwy 12, Lodi CA 95242. The program will take place between 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. and will include *Savitri* reading by Narad Eggenberger, a talk "Sri Aurobindo and the Significance of His Relics" by Alok Pandey, music by Vishnubhai, a film on Sri Aurobindo's life by Lopamudra Paul, lunch, and collective meditations. Please email sasp@auomere.com if you would like to attend.

AUM 2008 will be held at Estes Park Center/YMCA of the Rockies in Colorado, 1-5 June 2008. Registration forms are available at: <http://collaboration.org/aum/2008> and should be returned with fees by 1 April 2008 to guarantee reservation. The registration costs include lodging for 4 nights and 12 meals: Single room, \$400 (8 single rooms available on first-come basis); Couples room, \$240 per person (20 couples rooms available on first-come basis); Shared room \$205 per person (3 persons per room); children 6-12 years, \$80 per child (same room as parents); children 0-5 years, \$50 per child (same room as parents). The AUM committee is also seeking volunteers for participation in various activities. Please see the web site for details or write to: Sri Aurobindo Association, Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816.



AV almanac

Auroville celebrates its 40th anniversary

by Mauna van der Vlugt

Auroville is gearing up to the celebration of its 40th anniversary on 28 February 2008, a feat that is remarkable, that speaks for the perseverance of its residents, their tenacious adherence to the Vision, and the strength of the evolutionary force urging forth the experiment.

Although the details are not yet clear, the official program for the celebrations will include a collective meditation at the pre-dawn bonfire followed by a simple breakfast at the by then completed Matrimandir, a symposium on the Ideal of Human Unity, presentations on the township and its activities, exhibitions, opening of a new building, and an evening cultural program. On Golden Day, the 29th, the unveiling of a statue of Sri Aurobindo will take place in Savitri Bhavan, followed by other programs there. Another important feature on this day will be the Unity Kolam Ceremony, where samples of soil that have been sent to Auroville from all over the world, will be ceremoniously laid at the Amphitheatre at the feet of the Matrimandir, in a Kolam pattern that incorporates the Auroville symbol. The peak of the event will be the dismantling ceremony that involves sweeping together the soils of the world as a symbol of unity, and re-distributing these soils in beautiful gift packets, made in Auroville, symbolising Auroville's reaching out to the world.

For these two days, members of the United Nations, the Auroville Foundation and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram have been invited, some of whom directly afterwards will proceed to Delhi for further festivities there in the light of Auroville's 40th.

Apart from these more official activities, celebrations will take shape in the township in various modes and manner. There will be a conference on "Sri Aurobindo: The New Dynamism of the Material and the Spiritual" organized by Dr. Aster Patel, details of which and names of the speakers are still forthcoming; a Cultural Feast for all Auroville's neighbors and local officials; and of course, plenty of other happy occasions, such as photo exhibitions, theatre and dance performances, various cultural programs, performances and fairs by the local Tamilians, and youth activities.

And between it all, many a thought or prayer will rise up of gratitude and renewed courage and determination directed to the ones who brought all this about, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother ... Jay MA!

When, earlier this year, some parties didn't feel the need to celebrate, one of us—Aurovilian Ange, who grew up in the Ashram—wrote in September this year her reasons to celebrate, and we are happy to share these with you:

I'm a bit confused by this stuff flying around Auroville about whether or not we have anything to celebrate on Auroville's 40th birthday. No one can stop a celebration, and it is true that we don't make celebration much a part of our community life. More the sorry for it, as truly there is so much to celebrate here.

So here are a few things right off the top of my heart that I believe we could think worthwhile celebrating.

First, in the words of a friend: "We can celebrate the spirit of innovation and personal initiative that have endured and blossomed in Auroville."

Then, I would like to add that we can celebrate the fact that so many of us that have grown up here, return to join in the venture out of our own free will. This is not because we don't do well outside, but because this Dream, and whatever bits of it exist in this environment, makes more sense to us than all the success other societies can offer us ...

Let us celebrate that we are recognized as being, if not the largest, then one of the largest successful reforestation projects the world has seen. The work done on an educational and environmental impact of awareness is also growing to exemplary dimensions. On a quieter level, we can celebrate the fact that people from all over the world meet, work, dance, sing and learn together everyday. We do have conflicts, but we also have less advertised moments of the heart.

I want to celebrate the very large family that I have the privilege of living amongst, greeting, and networking with in goodwill. This family is about 200 strong, if not more. And even if I find some of my relatives difficult, in time of need I will be there for them. And when I see our children, and our youth, then I really want to celebrate. Celebrate the caring that goes on between the older for the younger kids, celebrate that we all of us, babies up to our eldest members, meet at any given concert, dance collective or party. Celebrate the feeling that our teenagers greet me, and make me feel like I'm OK. Where else in the world do different age groups not disown each other?

I believe we owe it to Her to celebrate that there is a basic sincerity in our blundering efforts to keep her Dream from getting lost in a tight web of bureaucracy. It is to be celebrated that we have and take the freedom to question our administrative body, and remold it to our best capacity, albeit clumsily in absence of examples. Let's celebrate that Auroville isn't a community of 'saints' dressed in white and in complete denial of the humanness we need to shed the light of consciousness on. It could have all gone so bad, if it wasn't for the Grace that steps in, into each one of our lives the moment we can say: "OK, Mother, I surrender."

Finally let us celebrate that we are here together, finding our way on the path that is also the goal. Auroville is the path towards human unity and the integrated becoming conscious of the individual. In human history this is barren and uncharted territory.

Go for it! Celebrate without shame!



Chronicles

Perspectives on the Yoga in America: An interview with Dakshina Vanzetti

Collaboration: What are the main aims of Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP)?

Dakshina: Our main purpose is to provide residential facilities and work exchange programs for the in-depth practice of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga in a collective Ashram environment. Our secondary purpose is to act as a regional center offering regular gatherings, programs and collective activities for aspirants and devotees in Northern California. We also distribute Sri Aurobindo books, foster center-to-center exchange and collaboration, and send regular donations to Auroville, Integral Schools and Sri Aurobindo related organizations. Additionally we have financed the construction and operation of Mother's House guesthouse in Pondicherry, though now it is running self-sufficiently. Recently there has developed a closer relation with the folks of Auroville International USA (AVI-USA), and we currently house the AVI-USA office on the premises and sponsor joint events and programs related to Auroville. But mainly I would like to say that this place, Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, is offered and dedicated to Mother and Sri Aurobindo; it is a place where people can come to feel their Presence and receive something from Them—a place for practicing sadhana, where we can learn to give ourselves more and more perfectly to the Divine and open ourselves to manifest something of the Divine Will.

Collaboration: How many people are living at SASP, and how many people come to visit?

Dakshina: At present we have four full-time residential members, plus three dogs and three cats. The extended friend circle of the Ashram is about 60-70 people



Dakshina at the ashram in Lodi. (Photo courtesy SASP)

in the Northern California region. So there is a kind of inner circle of members, the residents, and an outer circle of members from extended friends in the region.

Collaboration: What are some of the main activities taking place at SASP?

Dakshina: The running of the Auromere business in its many aspects takes a full-time concentration and participation by the members. Auromere is the income generating engine for the Ashram. Besides this we have gardening, cleaning and maintenance, kitchen work, and at present we are in the home stretch of a large construction project which has added a whole new wing to the main house.

Collaboration: What is the status of the new building? How will you make use of the new space?

Dakshina: We expect to be finished by early Spring of 2008, though other changes such as converting parts of the existing building to new purposes may take longer. The new wing houses a slightly larger meditation hall, a library/media room, extra bathrooms, bedrooms and guestrooms and a special room created to house the sacred Relics of Sri Aurobindo.

Collaboration: Tell us about the gardens on the property. What has been done on them recently?

Dakshina: The gardens are undergoing a very slow transformation under the capable hands of Angelo, one of the resident members. Due to the extra demands of the construction project the garden work has yielded way to other priorities. Around the new wing there is planned a Japanese-inspired garden.

Collaboration: What is daily life like at SASP?

Dakshina: Work, work and more work, but not as a drudgery, rather as the karma yogic way to offer our energies and activities at the feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We additionally have regular nightly collective meditation, a weekly study group and a monthly collective yoga retreat attended by friends and well-wishers in Northern California. Each member has free time to concentrate on individual pursuits in music, art, studies, physical culture, etc.

Collaboration: Tell us about your monthly retreats, what do you do together?

Dakshina: We have been holding these monthly retreats for 12 years now and each month about 15-20 members of the wider friend circle attend. As we are far from the big cities of the region, most attendees travel one to two hours to join us for the day. Though occasionally we may have a two or three day retreat, most often it is held just on the third Saturday of the month. We generally take up a theme for the day and base our activities around it. Some past themes have been: Aspiration, the Psychic Being, Physical Education, Yoga of Divine Works, Human Unity, Savitri, etc. One year we took up the 12 aspects from the Mother's symbol month by month. We start off with a collective meditation and may follow with a talk by a guest speaker or a reading or study group. Every few months the retreat group meets to decide the course of the next few gatherings and different people volunteer to organize one based on the theme which interests them. There are potluck meals and karma yoga activities, volley ball and sometimes music and children's activities. One important feature is the karma yoga activities which gives a beautiful opportunity for



everyone to come together in a collective work offering. I would like to say that over these 12 years I have participated in and witnessed the growth of a beautiful collective soul formed by this retreat group.

Collaboration: What takes place on darshan days?

Dakshina: On darshan days we always hold a special meditation, usually in the evening, during which we will have a reading or perhaps a film on Mother or Sri Aurobindo, followed by distribution of the Darshan Message from the Pondicherry Ashram. However, on August 15th we have traditionally held a 6:00 a.m. meditation outdoors around the Sri Aurobindo Symbol Garden. If the Darshan takes place on a weekend, then we are joined by many friends.

Collaboration: How is SASP managed?

Dakshina: Well, officially SASP is a non-profit corporation with a president and board members, but on a deeper level all the members participate in the work and growth of the Ashram to a greater or lesser extent according to their inner guidance; and on the deepest level I would say that indeed the Mother is managing the Ashram. Always we have before us the work that is to be done—often more than seems possible—but clearly each day what we have to do is there right before our eyes and hearts. To me this is one of the miracles of Ashram life.

Collaboration: How is your business Auomere doing?

Dakshina: Auomere is another miracle and boon from the Divine. This small business has been fueling Mother's work for over 30 years now. It is wholly owned by SASP and operated by the sadhaks of the Ashram and volunteer help. It is doing well, though there are always many opportunities for new growth that we cannot pursue with our limited staff. I feel though



A view of the new building addition at SASP. The room for Sri Aurobindo's relics is in the front. (Photo courtesy SASP)

that, with cultivation, care and consciousness, it can become a great means to generate the money-power needed for the future manifestation of Mother's work and the new creation. That is its purpose.

Collaboration: What kind of relationships do you have with the Ashram in Pondicherry and with Auroville?

Dakshina: We try to send one or two of our members each year to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville for spiritual replenishment. Outwardly we support Auroville though donations and closely collaborating with AVI-USA. We send regular donations to the Ashram through Mother's House which has been accepted as an Ashram guesthouse. Our members have deep friendship and spiritual kinship with many sadhaks in the Ashram and Auroville. We try to host visiting speakers from the Ashram and Auroville whenever possible and collaborate with other centers to organize their speaking tours. Inwardly, I feel there is a deep oneness with both the Ashram and Auroville, as though we are an outpost stationed here on the other side of the planet in this ocean of American materialism.

Collaboration: Which aspects of SASP do you feel are most in need of development?

Dakshina: It is our sincerity and the consciousness of the members that needs to develop and become more psychicalised,

then we would automatically know more truly what needs to be done to further the work of Mother and Sri Aurobindo that is before us.

Collaboration: What do you envision SASP will be like in five years from now?

Dakshina: I believe that we are coming to the brink of a new chapter for SASP with the coming of Sri Aurobindo's Relics. The effect that this tremendous Grace will have on the Ashram here and the wider collective in the region is something that my mind knows it cannot imagine. We shall just have

to see.

Collaboration: What could others around the country do to help the work of SASP?

Dakshina: Come and visit and participate, or especially at present with the ongoing construction funds are really needed and so appreciated. But I also feel it is important for people to connect with and actively support the centers or study groups in their own region. The centers all are serving Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's purpose with mostly limited means and a few dedicated persons—whatever way one can help would be a furtherance of Their Work. Several centers, like Matagiri or the East West Cultural Center, have a long history of serving the Sri Aurobindo community and radiating Sri Aurobindo and Mother's Presence in the world. All the organizations have a great potential, but it needs a collective participation and support to make it happen.

All U.S.A. Meetings (AUM)

Collaboration: You have been involved with many of the AUM conferences. Are they fulfilling their main purpose?

Dakshina: This question seems to presuppose there is an overall fixed purpose or objectives that are set down by a someone or some group of people, but that is not the case. Each year the AUM is



hosted and organized by a different Sri Aurobindo group or center from a different region of the country and that group largely determines the theme and scope of the conference. However there is a fairly recent development of an “AUM Continuity Team” that tries to help keep the AUMs to a certain caliber, encouraging and trying to respond to feedback from participants, and has created an AUM planning manual, so that each group of organizers doesn’t have to reinvent the wheel each time.

However, from what I understand, the original intention of the AUM was to create a forum and an occasion for devotees of Mother and Sri Aurobindo and friends of Auroville to come together on a regular basis and see what would evolve out of that. I think that it arose out of a shared aspiration for a more collective experience of the yoga. And each year this collective experience keeps on evolving.

Collaboration: What do they offer people relatively new to the yoga?

Dakshina: New people can benefit from some superb keynote talks that really help to bring clarity and understanding of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Also the connection with the wider collective is a wonderful support.

Collaboration: What do you particularly like about them?

Dakshina: The moments of soul connection, and the experience of the group soul which is also evolving from year to year, as though we come together each time on a higher round of the spiral. I feel that we are all part of what Mother calls one’s “true family” and there is a oneness there at a deep level that gets expressed or discovered or revealed. There are also moments that resonate with one’s own aspiration and I find there is too a kind of collective support or reinforcement for one’s individual personal effort in the yoga.

Collaboration: What would you like to see more of?

Dakshina: These moments which touch the psychic being and spur us onward and upward, which is something that happens spontaneously and is very hard to plan into the schedule. Different people are touched in different ways so it is good

to have a variety of activities and presentations and also opportunities for spontaneity.

Collaboration: Do you think they should be reaching out to a wider group of people? If so, what types of people? How might they do this?

Dakshina: AUM 2007 was an attempt to reach out to a wider group and also to interface with our “evolutionary allies” who may not be devotees of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, but are working along similar lines in terms of transformation of consciousness, and evolution and spirituality. Each year the AUM has a particular focus and is always evolving, one year there may be more outreach and another year a deep delving into the practice of sadhana. It is largely left up to the organizers, which vary from year to year as a different center or group from around the country takes up the AUM. One thing I would like to see encouraged is more participation of the younger generation and allowing their voices and their aspirations to be heard and valued.

Collaboration: Are the costs of the conferences keeping too many people away? If so, how could the costs be reduced?

Dakshina: Each year a grant is given by the Foundation for World Education to fund scholarships to make it possible for those with limited financial means to attend the AUM. AUM 2008 (June 1-5 at Estes Park, Colorado) is further taking up this challenge with an early fundraising campaign that will make it possible for everyone to attend the AUM at a very minimal cost. As nearby Denver airport is a national hub, the airfare should be reasonable as well. This AUM will have less speaker presentations and more workshops and discussion groups, as well as opportunities for physical and creative activities in the beautiful setting of the Rocky Mountain National Park.

Coordination of centers

Collaboration: How well coordinated are the various centers in the U.S.?

Dakshina: There could definitely be

more dynamic collaboration between the centers. At present there is a Centers email list where pertinent information is shared, such as when speakers come from the Ashram or Auroville to the US to coordinate their lecture tour. There is also some center-to-center exchange that is taking place between a few centers and study groups, regionally and across the country, where members of one center travel to help out or participate in the activities going on at another center. The centers have recently pooled funds to print an updated brochure that lists all the centers, study groups and related organizations in North America. Also, in spite of the fact that most of the centers are financially strapped, there is often monetary support that is gifted from one center to another in support of a particular need or project.

Collaboration: Are there any projects currently being done to improve their communication and mutual support?

Dakshina: There is a centers email list where information pertinent to the centers is shared, and a few years back a centers task force was formed to take up various collective projects, such as the overhaul of the Miraaura website and formation of a Presenters Bureau that would be a source for qualified speakers and presenters on Sri Aurobindo’s teachings, Integral Yoga and Auroville. But the initial enthusiasm in these collaborative undertakings waned as people found they didn’t have enough time to dedicate to it. There is currently a new project coming up to create a master mailing list for all the organizations so that all the lists will have the most updated addresses, and yet preserve the separate ownership and control of each list and the privacy of the people on the lists.

Collaboration: Is there something else that should be done to improve their coordination?

Dakshina: I think that this requires a bit more of something like sacrifice. It takes the extra effort beyond one’s full-time work or that little bit of spare time one would rather spend on one’s own interests—and the people involved are already giving of their time and resources to the development of their particular group. This is



something that cannot be forced or imposed and it has to come out of our love for the Divine, and a kind of vision or will towards collaboration. When we are ready, the opportunities will be there.

On the collective yoga in America

Collaboration: How do you perceive the present status of the yoga in America? Are you satisfied with the amount of participation in the collective work?

Dakshina: I feel that the collective work is especially difficult to realize in this country where everyone is spread out so far and often live isolated by hundreds or thousands of miles from other devotees or aspirants. There are other opportunities of course to connect via the internet via on-line groups such as Auroconf, but I think there is definitely more potential for collaboration and working together that has yet to be developed. Those who live close enough to participate in regional centers and study groups have even more opportunities. I would like to say that there is a tremendous joy that one can experience by giving of oneself in a collectively dedicated work, even if it's just an afternoon dusting the books or weeding in the garden at the local center; we get a chance to connect with each other on a different level than we do in meditation or study groups.

In a sense, we all who are followers of Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the Integral Yoga are their instruments and task force in the world. Just imagine if everyone of us who are connected in this way would offer our talents in the service of the Mother's work, how much could be accomplished. There are many who do so, but so many who maybe don't even realize that there is this need and opportunity just

waiting for their participation and collaboration. Whether it is fundraising for Auroville, designing a website for a local center, volunteering at the AUM, organizing a talk or starting a study group in your area, contributing time or money to support one of the many manifestations of Mother's work going on in the world—we could all become more active.

Collaboration: What are some of the main obstacles to the further development of the collective yoga in America?



A view of the relics room. The small tree is a cutting from the Service Tree beside the Samadhi in Pondicherry. (Photo courtesy SASP)

Dakshina: It seems that people's lives are busier than ever now with job demands and family demands. But I think too that we make time for what we care about most, and that once we take the sincere steps to offer ourselves to a divine work, whether it is collective or individual, the Divine arranges things so that it works out.

Collaboration: What are some ways that more people could contribute to the collective yoga in the U.S.?

Dakshina: By connecting with others in the yoga, via your regional center or study group, an on-line discussion group, by attending the AUM conferences—or by helping to organize one, sponsor a speaker for the AUM or a lecture tour or help to arrange a talk in your area, sign up

for newsletters from various centers or institutes to be aware of their activities, donate your time or funds or even just your goodwill and encouragement to support the various activities and projects going on or struggling to start up in the U.S.—there are many ways if the interest is there.

Final thoughts and advice

Collaboration: You have been involved with the yoga for about 30 years.

Are you happy with its progress and where you are now?

Dakshina: I have come to understand that sadhana for me in this lifetime is through service and works, but this needs to be done in a state of constant remembrance and offering and oneness with the Divine. I am still far from realizing this state, but luckily Mother has said—to Dyumanbhai, I believe, when he lamented that he was so busy with works he had no time to concentrate on his spiritual growth—that “You do my work and I will do

your work.” This gives me the confidence to go forward with full faith that, as I plod along and try to be more sincere in offering myself to her work, Mother will do the needful for my inner life and sadhana.

Collaboration: Do you have any advice for Americans or others involved with the yoga?

Dakshina: Aster Patel related in one talk about growing up as a child in the Ashram that Mother would advise over and over to the children of that generation to “be conscious” and “find your psychic being.” Good advice for all of us on this remarkable journey.

Thanks Larry for the opportunity to share, *c'est ca!*



Essays

The American jewel center

by Michael Miovic

In one of the most densely suggestive prose passages Sri Aurobindo ever wrote, he gives the yogic clue to understanding how the microcosm of the human consciousness relates to the macrocosm of the earth consciousness. As far as I know, he never elaborated on this extraordinary insight elsewhere, so we are left to do so clumsily ourselves. The essence of his vision is that the earth has what we might call geospiritual centers of conscious energy, analogous to the system of *chakras* in the human being, and through these the Mahashakti expresses herself in matter as the divine Earth Mother. I shall quote Sri Aurobindo's statement here in its entirety so readers may imbibe the full height and breadth of his vision:

Seven times seven are the planes of the Supreme Goddess, the steps of ascent and descent of the Divine Transcendent and Universal Adya-shakti.

Above are the thrice seven supreme planes of Sat-Chit-Ananda; in between are the seven planes of the Divine Truth and Vastness, Mahad Brahma; below are the thrice seven steps of ascent and descent into this evolutionary world of the earth-existence.

These three gradations are successively Supermind or Truth-Mind, with its seven Suns; Life with its seven Lotuses; Earth with its seven Jewel-Centres.

The seven Lotuses are the seven *cakras* of the Tantric tradition, descending and ascending from Mind (*Sahasradala*, *Ajna*, *Visuddha*, *Anahata*) that take up Life through Life in Force



Michael Miovic outside his home in Boston, Massachusetts. (Photo courtesy Michael Miovic)

(*Manipura*, *Swadhisthana*) down to Life involved in Matter (*Muladhara*).

All these Life-Centres are in themselves centres of Truth in Life even as the seven Suns are each a flaming heart of Truth in luminous Divine-Mind-Existence; but these lotuses have been veiled, closed, shut into their own occult energies by the Ignorance. Hence the obscurity, falsehood, death, suffering of our existence.

The Jewel-Centres of the Earth Mother are seven luminous jewel-hearts of Truth in Substance; but they have been imprisoned in darkness, fossilised in immobility, veiled, closed, shut into their own occult energies by the hardness, darkness and inertia of the material Inconscience.

To liberate all these powers by the luminous and flaming descent of the Suns of the Supermind and the release of the eighth Sun of Truth hidden in the Earth, in the darkness of the Inconscience, in the cavern

of Vala and his Panis, this is the first step towards the restoration of the Earth Mother to her own divinity and the earth-existence to its native light, truth, life and bliss of immaculate Ananda. (*The Hour of God*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1993, pp. 74-75)

To me this passage is absolutely stunning, and it begs the question of where are the seven jewel centers? And how do they influence the evolution of consciousness? One might surmise that the seven jewel centers are the seven continents, but this is not a full answer to the riddle as the lay concept of "continent" is not so easy to define precisely in scientific and geological terms. I cannot detail here all the facts and factors that have lead to my current state of speculation on these fascinating issues, but as best I have been able to intuit to date—and I welcome feedback on this work in progress—the general geospiritual mapping of the earth is listed below. Note that I have suggested some correlations between the human and terrestrial organizations of consciousness that stand



outside the seven chakras of classical yoga, in order to include important aspects of Sri Aurobindo's larger phenomenology of consciousness such as the psychic being, subconscious, and Inconscient. Although he does not explicitly say so in the passage above, the implication is that since the Earth Mother is a sacred manifestation of the supreme Mahashakti, all of the planes of consciousness and parts of the being must be included in some fashion in her geospiritual organization.

Chakra (human) Jewel Center (terrestrial)

1. Sahasradala	Maha-Asia
[Chaitya Purusha]	Maha-Bharat, India
2. Ajna	Maha-Europa
3. Visuddha	Maha-Asiatica <i>minoris</i>
4. Anahata	Maha-Africa
5. Manipura	Oceana and mid Pacific islands?
6. Svadisthana	Micronesia, Polynesia, New Zealand?
7. Muladhara	Maha-America (both North and South)
[Subconscious]	Maha-Australia
[Inconscient]	Maha-Antarctica

Whatever errors exist in this initial formulation, I am convinced that the Americas (both North and South) represent the *muladhara* jewel center for the world. In this article, I will share some reflections on how the *muladhara* or physical consciousness is reflected in the culture of the United States. I do so because I am citizen of that country and have been asked to write about the American contribution to Integral Yoga. However, let me clarify from the outset that I do not consider the United States to be more important or spiritual than other countries in the Americas. Unfortunately, people generally use the word "America" to refer specifically to the United States—as though all the other countries in the Americas are not also "America." This is mistaken and disavows the spiritual unity of Maha-America, the Goddess of the *muladhara* jewel center, who extends herself equally and majestically throughout every inch of land in the Amer-

icas. Thus, I look forward to the day when *all* Americans will consider themselves united in the consciousness of Maha-America, and when people from all of the jewel centers shall share in the mutual yoga of awakening and transforming the Earth Mother.

Also, I should point out that the ultimate characterization of each jewel center must be based upon direct spiritual experience of the earth in each geospiritual region. For instance, in my experience the subtle aura of China is golden-yellow, that of Africa deep rose-red, the countryside of India feels extremely soft and motherly, and there are subtle variations in the quality of the "golden" aura one sees in Bengal, Mongolia, Macchu Picchu (Peru), and New York city that differentiate the geospiritual force felt in each location. These sorts of perceptions would need to be checked, repeated and refined by multiple souls over time in order to develop a branch of yoga focused on the Earth Mother. Pending that, in this essay I use the approach of mapping backwards from the consciousness of the people to the consciousness of the land, because illustrative examples from human culture are more readily accessible to readers than unfamiliar statements about the consciousness of the earth.

With those provisos noted, let us proceed. The overall geospiritual organization of the Earth is as follows: the north pole of the earth corresponds to the head of the human body, and the south pole to the feet, hence the general hierarchy of the planes of consciousness grading downwards from the overhead into the mental planes in the northern hemisphere; through the various levels of the vital around the equator; down into the physical and subconscious as one moves southward, into finally the Inconscient in Antarctica. At the same time, east corresponds to the inner being and west to the outer, hence there is a gradual movement in consciousness from inner to outer as we move westward around the world from east Asia towards the Americas. Thus we have represented in the earth consciousness the two major organizations of consciousness

that Sri Aurobindo describes in Integral Yoga, a vertical organization of the planes and a concentric organization that moves outward from the inmost, to the inner, to the outer being.

Although there are many pieces of the geospiritual puzzle to resolve, some fall readily into place. India must be the world-soul, as culturally her thirst for the Infinite and Transcendent and her plethora of spiritual and mystical traditions are unique on the planet. What else could she possibly be, with her rishis and Vedas and Upanishads and Gitas and yogis, and the inimitably subtle and spiritual impulse we feel so pervasively in all her arts and creative activities? Interestingly, one can note on the map that the Indian subcontinent adjoins Asia proper, the *sahasradala* jewel center, for India opens upwards in consciousness via the Intuition towards the Infinite; while at the same time she stands to the east of and behind Africa, the outer heart, as India is the inner heart, or psychic consciousness of the world. Mother and Sri Aurobindo have both indicated that India is the soul of the world, and that the inner battle for the supramental transformation will be either won or lost on her soil.

The influence of the mental consciousness in European cultures is also unmistakable. The positive manifestations of the *ajna* jewel center are clearly seen in Europe's cultural history of the luminous Idea gone gloriously right, as in the cultural achievements of ancient Athens, the organizational accomplishments of Rome and the Catholic Church, the artistic blossoming of the Renaissance, the rationalism and scientific developments of the Enlightenment, the wonderfully mental inspirations of European classical music and painting. On the other hand, every spiritual power brings with it a pressure for transformation, and those who resist this evolutionary demand will manifest just the opposite as a negative trait or tendency. Hence in Europe we see also examples of the errant Idea gone terribly wrong, as in the Inquisition, the destructive aspects of colonialism, the division and strife of two world wars, and two different systems of bad ideas carried to perniciously destruc-



tive extremes, Nazism and Communism.

Without too much further inference, we can surmise that the Middle East must be the *visud-dha* center of the Earth, for we find there all the pluses and perils of the externalizing mind: on the positive side, the power to canalize mental will and conception into dynamic action, which has led to the genesis of the world's first written scripts and first civilizations, and three great monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam); cultures that value the dynamic expression of word, deed, and power; languages that have a curious abundance of guttural or throaty sounds; and of course the modern oil trade, which literally runs the world. On the negative side we have all that leads to the intractable conflicts of the Middle East: a tendency towards narrow-mindedness, domination, religious intolerance, fundamentalism, and at the extreme, terrorism, which is the power-play the few use to control the many.

And, finally, Africa must be the *ana-hata*, or heart center of the world. On the positive side, she is the ancestral home of the human being, her musical traditions are rich in deep and sensitive expression of the heart-felt emotion, and her peoples when well tend to be exceptionally warm and friendly. On the negative side, Africa's abysmal poverty and heartlessly inhuman cruelties lead to her legendary abundance of heartbreaking misery. While human suffering is horrible to witness anywhere and everywhere, there is always something especially heart-wrenching about the tales of woe that come out of Africa. All of these cultural clues point to the fact that Africa is the heart center for the world.

This brings us to the topic of this essay, the Americas, in particular the United



The spectacular Niagara Falls are made up of The American Falls, Bridal Veil Falls, and Horseshoe Falls. (Photo courtesy www.wikipedia.org).

States. I have already postulated that Maha-America is the *muladhara* jewel center of the Earth Mother. Now, while the positive traits of the physical consciousness are material strength, physical stability, and the power of conscious substance to manifest spiritual force and the dreams of the Spirit, its negative traits are inertia, obstinacy, slowness to respond to spiritual force, and a tendency towards mechanical repetition of old habits and patterns. In a general way, all of these traits perfectly describe the cultural evolution of the Americas: last among the jewel centers to be settled by human beings, American civilizations always lagged 500 to 1000 years behind their Eurasian counterparts in terms of science, technology, and political and cultural development and sophistication (for those who are interested, the environmental circumstances that enforced this tardy evolution in the Americas is explained in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, a fascinating book). However, on the positive side, all the pre-Columbian civilizations of the Americas cultivated a profound sense of communion with Nature, which is abundantly evident in ethnic American art forms. One has only to spend a little time contemplating the pyramids of the Mayas

and Aztecs, or the Inca city of Macchu Picchu, to feel how solid and close to the earth their architecture was. See how much more physical and earthy the aesthetic is, as compared to the geometry of the Egyptian pyramids, the mental simplicity of Greek temples or grandeur of Gothic cathedrals, the other-worldly subtlety and refinement of the Taj Mahal. Native Americans from both north and south seem perpetually in love with mud and earth and stone and nature, and all unanimously concurred that the Earth is

sacred. Whereas the religions of Eurasia invariably aspired to leave or transcend the earth, to go to Heaven or Paradise or Nirvana, etc, native American religions never felt any need for the spirit to leave the earth consciousness.

The most impressive example of the materializing power of the Americas, however, is the modern United States. It is amazing to consider that, only a few centuries ago, the land of the United States was a vast area that had been well loved and wandered by many small tribes for 10,000 years, but which had never, in all that time, sustained any large civilization in the Eurasian fashion. Then, when the American jewel center finally joined the global collective evolution, in a short time the United States built the world's first stable democracy, and then proceeded to pump out such a mass of material productions that she became a superpower almost overnight. We shall return to those technological achievements later,—even Sri Aurobindo once called her the home of the mechanical genius—, but in the true spirit of the Americas, let us begin with first things first, the land.

The first and ultimate gift of the United States is the spiritual power of her land.



Nature everywhere has a spiritual power and peoples everywhere have been moved to commune with the great Earth Mother, but in the United States the need to commune with the land takes on a primacy and spiritual urgency that is not felt so acutely or so insistently outside the Americas. The staggering breadth and power and abundance of the land was a fact that could not fail to impress itself upon the early European settlers in the United States, and this power is still felt to this day. What visitor to these shores has not been moved by the motionless movement of this sacred land? I

have met people from every corner of the planet who quickly and accurately criticize everything that is wrong with contemporary American culture and politics—and there is no shortage of problems to highlight—yet even the staunchest critics fall mute in the face of the land. Put a visitor in front of the Grand Canyon, the Niagara Falls, the half dome in Yosemite, the redwood stands in California, the autumn foliage in New England, the vastness of the Great Plains, or the monumental rise of the Rocky Mountains, and you will see sheer awe and wonder come over them. Instinctively people open to the natural beauty of the American land, the breathing silence of her vast forests, the mighty sweep of her plains, the voluminous abundance of her lakes and flowing waters, her rich endowment of trees and mountains and deserts and broad skies, all flanked by the largeness of two great oceans.

Sensitive Euro-Americans were quick to respond to this power of the land, and this inspiration is evident in some of the founding pillars of modern American culture. To begin with, there is the characteristic turn towards Nature as a spiritual fount that is pervasive in the work of the



Walden Pond in a mystic mood. (Photo by Richard Lenat)

Transcendentalists, notably Emerson and Thoreau. Both read some of the earliest translations of the Gita to reach the West, and both were duly inspired by the wisdom of ancient India. But they responded to the Gita in a typically American way—by turning to Nature as an expression of the Divine. Interestingly, nowhere does the Gita explicitly advocate this approach to yoga. In fact, quite the opposite: in one instance Krishna recommends cutting down or razing “the world tree” by its roots, in order to attain the Transcendent. This path of transcending the five senses, while certainly worthwhile, is not especially sympathetic to the path of communing with Nature as the road to the Divine. Such a transcendental approach is appropriate and natural in India, the soul-center of the world and the gateway to the Infinite, but is unnatural and inappropriate in the Americas. Indeed, there could be nothing more devaluing to Maha-America than following this path to its logical conclusion, for it entirely negates her divine role and purpose in the manifestation. Thus, we find the revealing outcome of two spiritually minded Americans who read the Gita and named their brand of philosophy after the Indian quest for the Transcendent, yet set

out in the opposite direction from the Indian sages—into the consciousness of Nature rather than above or beyond it. Incidentally, Emerson and Thoreau had little contact or familiarity with Native American culture, which shows that their spiritual opening to Nature came via the influence of the American jewel center herself, not through a cultural transmission. Indeed, most North American appreciation of Nature is proof of the power of the land to mold human consciousness, as the culture of the United

States has little or no continuity with prior Native American cultures.

Take, for example, this passage from Thoreau. Except for the last sentence or two, which fall off into a mental commentary, the inspiration is almost purely psychic. One feels that the author’s psychic being is infusing itself into the natural setting, and Maha-America, in turn, is reciprocating:

Solitude (from *Walden Pond*, p. 84)

This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whippoorwill is borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lake,



my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The repose is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit now roam the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature's watchmen,—links which connect the days of animated life.

This line of inspiration is taken up repeatedly in the tradition of American nature writing, which my spiritual brother John Robert has commented on in a companion piece in this issue.

But even in American writing that is less purely about nature, the presence of the natural setting usually looms large in the background. The Mississippi river, for instance, is almost the third main character in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, which to this today is still the leading candidate for the "great American novel." Whitman, too, is abundantly inspired by the land and hymns the land repeatedly in *Leaves of Grass*.

Or take the quintessential American song, "America the Beautiful." Inspired by the view from Pike's Peak in the Rocky Mountains, the diction and form of thought come from a European Christian influence, but the fundamental response to the spiritual power of the land is authentically American:

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee

And crown thy good with brother-
hood
From sea to shining sea!

This love of the land has lead visionary Americans to create the largest and most extensive system of natural parks and wildlife preserves in the world, to found the Sierra club and the environmental movement, and currently is inspiring Al Gore to wake up wasteful Americans to the problem of global warming. The current administration of the United States continues to be lethargic and obstructionist in this regard—again the stigmata of resistance in the physical consciousness—but one senses that change is brewing in the American psyche. And once the mass of

This love of the land has lead visionary Americans to create the largest and most extensive system of natural parks and wildlife preserves in the world . . .

Americans throw themselves behind the cause of environmental preservation, the results will be formidable. For there is no cause closer to the heart of Maha-America than communion with the earth, and if Americans align themselves culturally with the spiritual destiny of their jewel center, the capacity of Maha-America to support this line of sadhana will be virtually limitless.

If one has any doubts about the ability of the American jewel center to respond materially to a genuine spiritual need and call, one has only to look at what she did for the Allies in World War II to weigh her true potential. Today the world takes it for granted that America is a superpower, but remember that only 60 years ago she was not. In the 1930s, when Europe still ruled the world, America was a second-tier power who lay crippled by a devastating economic depression. She had never exerted any sizeable influence in global politics and generally eschewed foreign involvements. Little over 10 years later, she was the most powerful military and material

force the world has ever known. When the call came and she finally responded—and we know from Sri Aurobindo's writing how dire was the need and how real the call—the United States arose with staggering material might. With one arm she reached across the Atlantic and smashed down the lethal Nazi war machine, while with the other she stretched all the way across the Pacific and brought imperial Japan to her knees. And what was the secret of her success? Sheer *material* force. The Germans designed better equipment, the English had more fortitude and sharper military intelligence, the Russians had the protection of their impenetrable winters, and the Japanese were masters of the unexpected stroke and suicidal attack, but the Ameri-

cans simply made more boots and steel. In the end it was the vast resources of the American land funneled through her prodigiously muscular industrial ca-

capacity that turned the tide of the war.

As well as, of course, the atom bomb. Yet even here her method was typically American, for the ideas, the mental power, behind the bomb was all European, in accordance with Europe's function as the *ajna* jewel center of the earth. The science behind the bomb was discovered in Europe, by Einstein and others, and then America simply imported the brain power and gave them the material backing to turn concept into physical fact. Likewise with so many other American "inventions," which are more accurately described as materializations of European ideas. From a short list: Da Vinci conceived the first designs for flying machines, but the Wright brothers made the first airplane and launched it at Kitty Hawk. European scientists worked out the science of electromagnetism, but Edison and the Americans made light bulbs and telephones and televisions. Europeans thought out the basic theory of computer science and computing machines, but Americans produced the home computer, the Internet, and Apple



and Microsoft. Europeans designed the first automobiles, but Ford made the first production line and then pumped out enough cars to cover a continent. These and many other examples point to the characteristically American ability to materialize *things*, to work with matter and create from the physical consciousness.

Of all the many things the United States has materialized to date, perhaps none reveals the relationship between the American psyche and the American jewel center more aptly than the automobile. The mark of the physical consciousness is pervasive in the design and use of American automobiles, and this is obvious when one compares them to cars from elsewhere. Japanese cars, which come from the *sahashradala* jewel center, show an intuitive synthesis of many different design elements perfectly blended into a whole—light yet elegant styling, quality, performance, endurance, safety, price, and innovation (as in the new hybrids) all fused together into one. The consciousness of European cars, from the *ajna* jewel center, is mental, not intuitive, and as a result their modeling is a little heavier than the Japanese esthetic, and each car is designed to express one concept well, rather than synthesize multiple concepts and aims into a whole. Hence we have the safe Volvo, the high-performance BMW, the lovable VW Beetle, the smooth suspension of Citroen, the outstanding Mercedes, the cheap Fiat, the racy Maserati, the concept of a hatchback (the VW Rabbit and then Golf), etc. Each of these cars has an admirable virtue, but none combines so many different virtues simultaneously as a Toyota or a Honda.

And now we come to the American car, which lacks completely in any virtue other than the fact it is car. The American car is just a mass of metal and plastic that guzzles gas and moves. We have super-big masses of metal and plastic (Hummers), medium big masses (pick-up trucks and SUVs), and normal masses of otherwise unremarkable cars (Chevy, Ford, and GM sedans) that we produce and dispose of in gargantuan quantities. But to counter-balance this egregious lack of virtue in design and performance, we have

the other and better half of the American driving experience: the land. One can make a defensible argument that the most important piece of religious architecture in the United States is the interstate freeway system. For it is here, out on the road, that the average American opens most commonly to some greater, spiritual consciousness. It is here that we recall the sweeping majesty of plains and valleys, gaze longingly at the rise of great mountains, imbibe the brooding grandeur of the deep green forests, admire the stark power of desolate deserts, cross mighty rivers and skirt vast oceans. It is out here, on the road, that our consciousness widens to touch the blue horizon and embrace that mighty and incredibly beautiful wonder of Nature that is the United States. Yes, it is on the road that we really *settle* into the lap of Maha-America, and so it is here that we feel most nurtured and most at peace. This is the spiritual necessity of the famous American “road trip,” that constant ritual that lies at the heart of so many American songs, books, and movies—as well as so many business plans and personal decisions large and small. To meditate, to find themselves and find God, Americans need to get in their cars and spend time with the land.

However, the American love of the physical consciousness is not expressed only in the arena of mechanics and technology, it is felt too in music and the arts. European classical music is a marvel of mental conception and execution, with her great composers who lay down guiding musical ideas, and then conductors who lead perfectly trained and organized symphonies to execute these musical orders precisely. American music, on the other hand, is a loosely organized cacophonous thing that revels in the *physical* quality of sound as a substance. Listen to New Orleans jazz, with its brassy horns and discombobulated sound, or the rich texture of saxophones in later jazz. Hear the squawking harmonica of American folk music, the honky-tonk roughness of the blues, the big and brash sounds of Big Bands and Broadway musicals, and of course the electric guitar and all that amplified fuzzy feedback of rock n’ roll. What other coun-

try could have produced a voice such as that of Louis Armstrong, with its molten liquid golden gravelly texture? Or the massive meandering electric noise of Jimi Hendrix? Or the raspy drawl of Bob Dylan?

This physical quality of the music itself is matched by a complementary turn towards the physical consciousness in the lyrics. For instance, compare how Elvis Presley sings about heartbreak to how the Beatles do. Elvis, an American, conveys emotion via a narrative about movement through space to a new place (the Heartbreak Hotel), and objects such as streets express his feelings:

Well, since my baby left me,
I found a new place to dwell.
It’s down at the end of lonely street
at Heartbreak Hotel.

On the other hand, Paul McCartney, a Englishman, does not give us a single real physical referent in his poignant evocation of love lost. His narrative is entirely about the psychological essence and impact of losing a relationship:

Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so
far away
Now it look as though they’re here to
stay
Oh, I believe in yesterday

Suddenly, I’m not half the man I used
to be
There’s a shadow hanging over me
oh, yesterday came suddenly

Why she had to go I don’t know, she
wouldn’t say
I said something wrong, now I long
for yesterday

One may perhaps object that the Beatles were more intellectually gifted than Elvis, hence the greater mental coherence of their lyrics. Very well then, let us turn to contemporaneous work by Bob Dylan, who was even more verbally gifted than the Beatles. Note how even this most articulate American is compelled to tell stories via the agency of objects and physical



things in “It’s All Over Now Baby Blue”:

You must leave now, take what you
need, you think will last.
But whatever you wish to keep, you
better grab it fast.
Yonder stands your orphan with his
gun,
Crying like a fire in the sun.
Look out the saints are comin’
through
And it’s all over now, Baby Blue.

The highway is for gamblers, better
use your sense.
Take what you have gathered from
coincidence.
The empty-handed painter from your
streets
Is drawing crazy patterns on your
sheets.
The sky, too, is folding under you
And it’s all over now, Baby Blue.

All your seasick sailors, they are row-
ing home.
All your reindeer armies, are all going
home.
The lover who just walked out your
door
Has taken all his blankets from the
floor.
The carpet, too, is moving under you
And it’s all over now, Baby Blue.

Leave your stepping stones behind,
something calls for you.
Forget the dead you’ve left, they will
not follow you.
The vagabond who’s rapping at your
door
Is standing in the clothes that you
once wore.
Strike another match, go start anew
And it’s all over now, Baby Blue.

This is a very poetic description of a breakup, and the song (lyrics plus music) induces the almost physical sickness one feels in the throes of a loss. But mark that it is not until the third stanza that the listener is alerted to the fact this is a song about breaking off a romance. Prior to that, the

song seems mostly to be about the mysterious power of various natural and physical objects.

Again, this same orientation towards the physical is felt in other American arts. In the visual arts, for instance, note how physical the abstract expression of Jackson Pollock is compared to the conceptual genius of Picasso, Matisse and Dali. Pollock gives us an impressive material mass (some might say mess) of paint that records the physical energy of painting activity, whereas the European masters give us cubism and surrealism and abstract representations of ideas and moods and feelings. Or look at cinema: European cinema presents stories that make intellectual or artistic points, while American movies specialize in the material technology of special effects, as well as massive fight or chase scenes in which huge quantities of things are blown up, crashed, incinerated, shot up, wrecked, or otherwise reduced to material rubble.

There are also interesting examples of physicality in how language has evolved under the influence of the American jewel center. The English, when greeting each other, ask “how are you?” This is a psychological question and the ritualistic answers, even if totally false, highlight the importance of maintaining social relationships. Reply: “well, thank you, and how are you? [translated: my wife just left me, I have a woeful hangover, and I plan to shoot myself with a pistol later today.] Americans, on the other hand, ask “what’s up?” or “how are things?” or “what’s cooking?” Reply: “not much,” or “I’m in a pretty good place.” Also, they say “that’s where I’m at” to mean “that’s how I feel.” Note how the turns of phrase emphasize physical space, location, and things and objects over thoughts and feelings. Interestingly, an analogous evolution occurred in Spanish as it came to the Americas, e.g., whereas the Spanish use “vosotros” to address elders and respected figures as the formal form of “you,” in the Americas one says “usted.” To the Spanish ear this sounds odd, as “usted” is conjugated in the third person plural, not the second person plural as with “vosotros.” This turn of

phrase objectifies the person to whom you are speaking by calling them “them” rather than “you.” To Europeans this is illiterate nonsense, but to Americans it is not, because objects are good and conscious. Objects are physical, and the physical is sacred—for ultimately all objects come from the land, and the Land, as we know, is divine.

Well, we are back to the topic of the land, which is where all American narratives begin and end. So this must be a good place to end. But before I say goodbye, let me alert the reader to the fact that the consciousness of the land in the Americas varies greatly according to latitude. While all of Maha-America expresses the physical consciousness, she does so in a beautifully organized and graded fashion. Thus, moving from north to south, Alaska and Canada expressed the intuitive consciousness in the physical (*sahashrada-la*), the United States the *ajna* and *visud-dha* grades, Mexico the *anahata*, Central America the central vital, northern south America the lower vital (down to Colombia), middle South America the physical proper (in Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil), and southernmost South America grades into the subconscious (Chile, Argentina). Thus, the human culture at each level takes on characteristics of the specific plane of consciousness expressed in the physical at that level of the hierarchy. This is why technological and political development has proceeded more quickly in North America than South America after the Conquest, because the consciousness of the earth is lighter and more responsive in the north, and denser and more resistant in the south.

Also, this stratification of consciousness explains important variations of culture within the United States itself. For example, on the positive side, people from the northern half of the country, which grounds the mental physical, tend to be more liberal, secular, broad-minded, and to think like Europeans or Canadians (i.e., would favor cooperating with the UN, the Kyoto protocol, and pursuing diplomatic rather than military solutions to international problems). However, on the nega-



tive side, northern culture also tends to be emotionally colder, less outgoing, less affable, and is more obsessively mental. The southern half of the United States, in contrast, grounds the *visuddha* in the physical, so culture in this geospiritual region is prone to more conventional ideas, racial segregation, religious fundamentalism, and more hawkish attitudes towards exerting military force—all of which are obvious both historically and currently. However, on the positive side, this region also supports a more socially outgoing culture, and is rich in artistic expression. Thus we find here the famous southern hospitality and a wealth of gifted singers and performers, from New Orleans jazz, to Elvis, to country & western (Nashville), to gospel, to the Beach Boys in Los Angeles. And, of course, Hollywood lies in this band, too. Not coincidentally, President G.W. Bush demonstrates all of the strengths and weaknesses characteristic of this region, e.g., on the up side, he is frank, friendly, decisive, religious, and takes strong actions; and on the down side, he clings to wrong or limited ideas beyond all reason, is authoritarian, and is quick to use military force over diplomacy.

Finally, on the map you can see that Maha-America has the shape of a dancing Goddess. Her headdress is Canada, her broad face the United States, her chest and torso Meso-America, her hips northern South America, and she holds her legs together gracefully to form the tapering shape of southern South America. See how she dances her motionless movement of the land, stretching her glorious physique from pole to pole and sea to sea, just waiting to bestow her spiritual-material blessings on whomever will care to worship her. So, my fellow Americans, let us worship her. These stones speak, so let us listen to them. Great gods and infinite energies lie coiled in the earth beneath us, so let us always tread lovingly upon the body of our Mother.

All this to answer the question “what is the American contribution to Integral Yoga?” Conscious substance, communion with Nature, an awakened physical, materializing power.



*John Robert taking in the great outdoors.
(Photo by Karen Cornell)*

Song of the Land

by John Robert Cornell

Millions of people of European ancestry in North America do not really *live* here. So mused California poet Gary Snyder. We camp here. We take from the countryside, we learn enough to eat and reproduce here, we get rich or become the invisible poor, but we are not insiders. We do not know this land. We do not see the inside of it, the spiritual landscape behind the physical. We don't even see the outside, the deer trail we just walked across on the edge of town, the tiny blue starflower in the back yard. Some days we don't notice the sky. We are not yet native. We are not yet really *here*. We live off the land—but not on it. We still mistake it for something else, call it something else.

New York is not York, is not New Amsterdam, is not really *new* York. It is something else. Virginia has nothing to do with Elizabeth I, the virgin queen. Georgia does not exist by the grace of George II; it has its own grace. New England is neither old England nor new England. The human presence here, especially on the East Coast, looks back to European culture, reflects its language, its architecture, its philosophy, its values. The shadow of Europe is long on this land, but America is not Europe and

not New Europe. It is something else.

What is it?

America is more than a human collective or a political system. It also soars up in purple mountains above the fruited plain. It breathes in evergreen forests and tallgrass prairie, plunges far back into ancient coal deposits, wanders from rolling rivers to white and tan beaches. Once it blackened vast grasslands with herds of bison and the sky with clouds of mallards and Canada geese and locusts. It still prowls the woodlands in coyote eyes, meanders in spotted salamanders and watches over lowlands in granite spires and domes.

America is an idea. It is a story and a yearning that reach back deep into the past, and aspire far into the future. It is a complex particularization of the Mother-consciousness. It is an energy forming itself into peaks and prairie and desert of heart-stopping beauty and abundance. Its consciousness has come to the surface through the eyes and ears of cricket and cicada and dragonfly, sturgeon and salmon, porcupine and jackrabbit, American eagle and grizzly bear. Thirteen thousand years ago it became home to a mind that is self aware and ears that can hear the murmuring heart of the earth and eyes capable of seeing the inner truth of canyon and stream.

It is a pilgrimage.

America is a uniqueness as well as a musician and instrument in the earth symphony. It is a field of play and learning and a teacher. In the One World age, the movement of consciousness-force that is America is different from the movement of that force that we call Europe, or India, or Oceania, or Australia. It is its own thing, something old and something new still waiting to be discovered.

We don't yet know what America is, what its destiny or its true genius is. We are still being cooked. We don't know the whole recipe yet. We are not yet native to America or Earth.

Snyder tells of a conference of American Indians he attended in the 1970s in Bozeman, Montana.¹ There a Crow elder remarked that even white people would



eventually begin to hear the spirits of the land. He and his people were willing to wait. This land has been their home for thousands of years, the inner country too, just behind, overlaid with the outer mountains and plains and valleys. Eventually, after the immigrants were here long enough they would settle down, the conferees thought, would quiet down enough to hear the song of the land, see the other peoples of the land in the light of spirit. Eventually they too would find their deep home here, not just the veiled goddess of their desires, not just the testing grounds for their ideas and their arrogance, not just their garbage dump.

Becoming native

Some of them have.

In fact, the importance of place, of the landscape, of the natural geography in the American story goes far back into the past. There is a deep and ancient respect between the most self-conscious of the American peoples and the land itself. Anthropologist Keith Basso found that important cultural values of the White Mountain Apaches were inextricable from the places where representative events illustrating those values occurred. Luther Standing Bear tells how the Lakota people, especially the old ones, loved to remove their moccasins to touch the earth barefoot so they could enjoy direct contact with the sacred mothering power. Lakota writer Elaine Jahner explains that “at the heart of the religion of hunting peoples is the notion that a spiritual landscape exists within the physical landscape.”² Folklorist and Karuk Indian Julian Lang once asked his great-grandmother about the view of God among the old Indians. She replied, “Why the Earth! Ever’tin’. The rocks, the leaves, the mountains.” Lang elaborates, “Our sense is that all of nature grows from the Earth as strands of long hair connecting the present with the beginning of time and original knowledge.”³

These knowings may run deeper in European-ancestry Americans than we realize. In a visionary experience on an Indi-



Asilomar flowers. (Drawing by Karen Cornell)

an reservation, Robert Pirsig, author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, once saw how much of the American character comes from the American Indian.

From that original perception of the Indians as the originators of the American style of speech had come an expansion: the Indians were the originators of the American style of life. The American personality is a mixture of European and Indian values. When you see this you begin to see a lot of things that have never been explained before.⁴

Many of the new voices of the land have deliberately sought out teachers among the first Americans. Richard Nelson’s fine meditation on wilderness experience and human destiny, *The Island Within*, for example, regularly credits his Koyukon teachers for deep parts of his understanding:

I’ve often thought of the forest as a living cathedral, but this might diminish what it truly is. If I have understood Koyukon teachings, the forest is not merely an expression or

representation of sacredness, nor a place to invoke the sacred; the forest is sacredness itself. Nature is not merely created by God; nature is God. Whoever moves within the forest can partake directly of sacredness, experience sacredness with his entire body, breathe sacredness and contain it within himself, drink the sacred water as a living communion, bury his feet in sacredness, touch the living branch and feel the sacredness, open his eyes and witness the burning beauty of sacredness. And when he cuts a tree from the forest, he participates in a sacred interchange that brings separate lives together.⁵

Finding Spirit within nature seems to be essential to the American story told by the ancient voices of the land.

Prize-winning author Barry Lopez notes that writing which explicitly recognizes nature and place as central to human life is an old and singular thread in American literature. An early flowering of this literature in the works of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman inspired generations of Americans. At the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, John Muir, who deeply venerated Emerson, celebrated breaking through the veil that separates the isolated ego from the great powers of nature all around it:

Here is calm so deep, grasses cease waving.... Wonderful how completely everything in wild nature fits into us, as if truly part and parent of us. The sun shines not on us but in us. The rivers flow not past, but through us, thrilling, tingling, vibrating every fiber and cell of the substance of our bodies, making them glide and sing. The trees wave and the flowers bloom in our bodies as well as our souls, and every bird song, wind song, and tremendous storm song of the rocks...⁶

The stream of respectful, attentive



writing about nature quietly grew into a river in the twentieth century. Here and there, outcroppings of the numinous glow like crystals in the reports of American nature writers, the new voices of the land. Some of the best known of these voices include Rachel Carson, Mary Oliver, Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, Robinson Jeffers, Kenneth Rexroth, Terry Tempest Williams, Loren Eisley, Frank Waters, Thomas Berry, Ann Zwinger, Ansel Adams, Barry Lopez, Annie Dillard, John McPhee, Peter Matthiessen. But the list goes on and on. And one suspects that these gifted writers are the tip of an iceberg, articulating what many other Americans and many visitors to America experience without the same outlet or power of expression.

Here are a few samples of this outpouring.

From Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*:

If the landscape reveals one certainty, it is that the extravagant gesture is the very stuff of creation. After the one extravagant gesture of creation in the first place, the universe has continued to deal exclusively in extravagances, flinging intricacies and colossi down aeons of emptiness . . . The whole show has been on fire from the word go. I come down to the water to cool my eyes. But everywhere I look I see fire; that which isn't flint is tinder, and the whole world sparks and flames.⁷

Art-historian-turned-naturalist Ann Zwinger reflects on a wild lily she is about to draw in her field journal:

The appearance of the lily on the page was the future, but I'd already seen that lily in my mind's eye, turned it in my hand, seen all lilies in this lily, known dryness in my roots, spreading in my leaves, sunshine polishing my stalk. Because of that



Zion tree. ((Drawing by Karen Cornell))

lily, which I'd never seen until a few days ago, I knew all about waiting for enough warmth, also about cool dawns and wilting noons, how aroma communicates and stamens speak. Because of that lily I knew about desert heat and winter sleep and what the desert demands.⁸

Peter Matthiessen, listening to the universal sound of the mountains, reports: "The sun is round. I ring with life, and the mountains ring, and when I can hear it, there is a ringing that we share."⁹

Even in politics this theme is resurfacing. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., reminded the Sierra Club Summit of 2005 that nature and particularly wilderness are sources of America's deepest values and character.

Our greatest spiritual leaders, moral leaders, and philosophers were telling the American people "You don't have to be ashamed because you don't have the 1,500 years of culture that they have in Europe, because you have this relationship

with the land and particularly the wilderness. That's going to be the source of your values and virtues and character. If you look at every valid piece of classic American literature the central unifying theme is that nature is the critical defining element of American culture, whether it's Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Jack London, F. Scott Fitzgerald, or Hemingway. All of them."¹⁰

Al Gore's work since the 2000 presidential election has focused on alerting America and the rest of the world to the natural catastrophe bearing down on us from the near future because of our systematic refusal, one could paraphrase, to become native to the earth, our systematic assault on nature using the tools of technology and values of commerce.

Many young Americans today who have some inclination to spirituality will tell you that nature was the source or occasion of their experience of spirit. Millions of people from all over the world come to the United States every year to experience the magnificent natural cathedrals and sacred places of the American West like the Grand Canyon; Yosemite National Park; Zion National Park; Bryce Canyon; Taos, NM; Oak Creek Canyon; Mount Shasta; Redwoods National Park; and others.

An American yoga

At the AUM conference in 2004, Mangesh Nadkarni compared the transhumanists movement in America with the Integral Yoga. He chose this subject, he said, because he thought that American sadhaks should take up the issues and potentials and pitfalls of American life and thought into their yoga. He suggested that we hail the transhumanists as fellow travelers, without implying agreement with much of their agenda.

Another, older, more basic flavor of American experience is this obsession with nature, especially wild nature.



Barry Lopez suggests that American nature writing develops from attentiveness to the particulars of a place and the intent to establish an intimate relationship with it. This can be taken up as spiritual practice—the concentration of consciousness with the intent of establishing relationship, a unity beyond the isolated ego. Lopez acknowledges that a heightened sensitivity to spiritual issues is one of the defining characteristics of this writing. Finding Spirit in the landscape has become a central motive for American natural-

ists, a continuation of the ancient tradition. But Lopez also observes how carefully they try to keep their spirituality “free of religious commentary.”¹¹ As a result, we often get lyrical, soulful descriptions of numinous encounters with the natural world without *any* supporting context. This wonderful thing happened (but we don’t know how or why). Or if we do know, we are not going to say. Nowhere in American nature writing do we find a foundation or a framework adequate to contain the outbreak of song and the depth of experience released in some of these writings. What psychology is implicated here? What part, what level of a human being is engaged in a supranormal or supraphysical encounter with a doe or a mountain or a giant sequoia? How is this possible, given the dominant materialist assumptions of contemporary American life? What understanding of the cosmos makes sense of these peak moments or this breaking through to another level? How can the sacred come through the doe’s eyes or the granite upthrust of the peak?

And—what *is* the sacred?

The practical, action-centered side of the American character does not encourage pursuit of these questions. Nonetheless, the contradictions remain to disturb



A deer in a glade. (Drawing by Karen Cornell)

and goad us to a more complete knowledge. Richard Nelson, for example, articulates the incompleteness of his experiences without a fuller understanding:

While I savored the freedom and sensual pleasure of these wild places, I’ve also wished for a clearer sense of how I fit in here, a better understanding of my relationship to the environment that contains me, to nature in general, and to the earth as a whole.¹²

Barry Lopez invokes the language of ethics and sometimes of theology from his Catholic education as a context, although not in a systematic way. But the intent, the practices, and the experiences in contemporary nature writing appear to reach beyond the mental terminology of philosophy and theology. When we listen to the outbreaks of song from some of these writers, we may be more reminded of Sri Aurobindo’s words about the song of the soul in the best poetry. There is a breaking through, a reaching beyond, a crossing of borders that take us beyond the surface mind and life into something on the other side.

This is where this emerging *native*

American spirituality and the Integral Yoga can meet. If there is an American yoga, a flavor of the spiritual endeavor that is native to North America, a native American spirituality, as distinct from but related to the spiritualities of the Native Americans, it must reflect this essential affinity to nature, especially wild nature.

The ‘Human Project’

A cosmic evolution is going on. The human species, product of that evolution, has just recently arrived on the

scene; much more recently has marveled at the action and the intricate, choreographed symmetry of the outer forms of this evolution; even more recently glimpsed the possibility of becoming a partner in the adventure of evolution.

Sri Aurobindo takes the scientific version of cosmic evolution and turns it inside out: Look *inside* for the fundamental thing that is evolving in the universe, consciousness itself. And he anchors the meaning and purpose of humanity’s appearance on earth in the context of *this* evolution. In human beings, nature has at last found an instrument capable of carrying the whole struggling universe on its back towards a greater consciousness.

We who must fill the role of the universe
Acting itself out in a slight human shape
And on our shoulders carry the struggling world.¹³

To fulfill this purpose the secret spirit evolving in nature gave us a gnawing dissatisfaction. Unlike the animals, who are perfect and complete as they are, we are unfinished. The human being as we are now, Sri Aurobindo wrote, is a



transitional being, not the final end of the evolution and the crown of terrestrial existence.

This ignorant, imperfect and divided being, with his labouring uncertain thought and half-successful will, this toiling and fluctuating experiment, this field of the attempt at emergence of a thousand things that are striving to be, is no consummation of the struggle of cosmic Force . . . There is something that he is not yet which he has to be; he is reaching always towards the something yet unrealised; his whole life and nature is a preparation, an endeavour of Nature towards what is beyond him.¹⁴

Each platform that humanity reaches to relieve the inner goad and achieve a stable

satisfaction reveals a new cage and a new and precarious stairway up the cliff to scale. We cannot relax, rest satisfied for long with the small round of our mostly animal lives or even a high mentality, because we are essentially unfinished.

Sri Aurobindo lays out for us the human project—the secrets to decode and the heights to scale to achieve the goal the secret spirit has set for us: We have to discover the covert intelligence and the will hidden in the stone and the elephant and the sunflower, and perceive it as one consciousness. We have to find the soul in the mechanical body of the universe and find the “supreme power of the Spirit in time and beyond time.” We have to break out of the cage of separative, surface knowledge, make direct contact with the inner forces and beings and become one with the cosmos, the individual universalized without losing its individuality. And we have to find a Supernature behind all appearances, a supreme Spirit in time and beyond time.¹⁵

This tremendous task can be done in a

thousand ways. “Because everything is that One, there must be this endless variety in the human approach to its possession.”¹⁶ All religions, all occult knowledge, all supernormal psychological experience are signposts on the road of that self evolving consciousness.

The secret to carrying the evolution forward, he tells us, is a double opening: to the inner being behind the surface consciousness and to the heights above it.

Currently humanity is stuck in the flattened consciousness of separate individuality, with no realization of any perceivable unity supporting it. Our task is to plunge through the veil separating the ignorant, separative surface consciousness to the

above and a reception from within that will determine the reactions of the being to cosmic experience... The outer world itself will become inward to the spiritual awareness, a part of itself, intimately embraced in a knowledge and feeling of unity and identity, penetrated by an intuitive regard of the mind, responded to by the direct contact of consciousness with consciousness . . . ”¹⁸

The plunge into the inner being and the unity experiences of cosmic consciousness we already find in these new voices of the land we have been discussing.

Wider context

But they have no context capable of supporting these experiences.

The Integral Yoga can offer an integral context that would give focus and direc-

tion to the heroic efforts of the new American voices of the land. Sri Aurobindo’s insistence on the Absolute as the basis and origin and “secret Reality of all things”¹⁹ would provide a balance and foundation that a strictly American perspective might not otherwise find because it is so preoccupied with the Immanent Divine. When Americans speak of “mind,” for another example, we often harbor the hidden assumption that it is the highest and last form of consciousness on earth and possible on earth. But Sri Aurobindo’s greater psychology characteristically gives mind its place without exaggerating it. He speaks of mind as primarily a percipient and interpreter of reality and only secondarily and derivatively as a creator of reality.²⁰ Understanding and experience are thereby liberated to seek a truer source of these supranormal experiences. The inner being as described by Sri Aurobindo is a rich target for this search.

In turn, the American yoga could offer practitioners of the Integral Yoga a field of

If there is an American yoga, a flavor of the spiritual endeavor that is native to North America. . . it must reflect this essential affinity to nature, especially wild nature.

wideness and light of the inner being behind the surface—the inner mind, inner vital, and inner physical, and the innermost self behind, the soul. With the opening made, forays to the inner being and returns from it can bring its gifts and widenesses. Great poetry and music, for example, come from there, as do powers considered paranormal to our surface being, like telepathy and clairvoyance.

Large parts of the inner light and power can be known by this penetration and by a freer communication with it. But to be fully self-aware, a more radical change is needed. We must learn to *live* and act from within and above, no longer stationed on the surface as before.¹⁶

The result, he tells us, would be “an enlargement and completion of our present evolutionary status.”¹⁷ Instead of matter being the foundation of consciousness in the cosmos, the new foundation will be “the new spiritual status above or the unveiled soul-status within us; it is a flow of light and knowledge and will from



exploration that is characteristically native and contributes both to breadth of yogic practice and to the American experiment. It would open for them an entrance into the depths of the American conversation about humanity and nature at a time when this conversation is critical to the earth. And it might provide sources for an exploration into the American soul to fuel a national renaissance and new energy for the human unity project symbolized by the International Zone in Auroville.

Beyond these reasons, there is, simply, an American song being sung, an American psalmody, a story that is one of the interweaving themes of the One World story.

Walk in the woods

If you would like to contribute to it, come for a walk in the woods with me.

No—better to go on your own. At first, human companionship can get in the way of the epiphany.

But here's a way to start: Picture the end of a road in the forest.

You set the emergency brake, hop out and lock the car. The little parking lot is otherwise empty this cool autumn morning. A single trail arrows down the slope, slots through waist-high grass above Beaver Creek, crosses the bridge, and slants up into wilderness on the other side. The South Grove ahead stretches for miles up the drainage. Only the first half of it has a trail. The rest is virgin forest. The giant stumps that you find in other coast redwood and giant sequoia sites in California are absent. This grove has not been logged. The forest in this watershed has *never* been destroyed by human hands.

The climb toward the grove winds up through sugar pine, douglas fir, dogwood, incense cedar, Western maple, and oak. No human people are in evidence besides yourself.

Long before you reach the first big



A walk in the woods. (Photo courtesy www.freefoto.com)

tree, a lightness and odd smoothness filter into your awareness. Breathing is easy. In fact, you are breathing in a particular way that eliminates all effort in the climb. You are floating up the trail. It's more like gliding through a clear pool than hammering up a rocky path. You glimpse an extended bubble of . . . what? something, floating uphill around you.

Then you notice how that "you" has thinned, slipped through unknown doors and windows, expanded. Everything in the forest is somehow inside you, or you are extended out beyond your ordinary boundaries. The extension is as effortless as the climb. You are not sure if "this you" is really you or something else. It feels both detached and engaged at the same time, like a camera in the forest—no, more like the film in the camera's eye, moving through the forest, with trees and bushes sliding by and into and through you on both sides and above. The perception is not: I am moving and all of this is rooted in place. The forest seems to be flowing by rather than you hiking through it. Or there is a mutuality in the movement. The movement and the forest and the "something" that is moving through it are all the same something. You can almost change points of view with the forest without making much difference. The convenient verbal shorthand that "you" are moving through "it" does have a perceptual base, but it is not very prominent. Instead there is a pal-

pable participation in—you don't want to call it "the forest," because that phrase already puts it out there, outside of you. It is not outside, not other. And, it isn't really the old, ordinary "you" that "it" is inside of. That you is a small fold carried along in this larger containing awareness.

You begin to notice other individuals standing quietly, waiting. Especially the big trees, the vast silence of the big trees. The biggest one in the South Grove is said to be among

the 10 largest living beings on earth. These giants, some of them 2500 years old, are individuals, not objects, not "trees." There is a large, watching, benevolent, calm presence in them that enfolds you. You just settle into it. But the small trees too and the little bushes are individuals in the sense that you could have a relationship with this one or that one there, without forcing it or trying much. A natural movement of interest and curiosity recognizes and reaches out to another subjectivity. And you do have a relationship with some of them, though it is mostly a passing nod rather than a deep conversation. Except for the big trees, of course, where the relationship feels fundamental and unquestioned and not in need of any maintenance.

You are still aware of your body, but that awareness is changing, too. Most of the day you remain conscious of a satisfying swelling that grows in the chest. The inner awareness seems to have the same wide peripheral angle as the sense vision, so that you entertain thoughts and sense the feelings in the chest and the skin and enjoy the buoyant ballet with the forest, all comfortably in awareness at the same time rather than sequentially. You feel three-dimensional, instead of hard and flattened on the surface of being.

A clear light glimmers subtly above your head. Again, "above your head" implies more of a separate boundary than is there. The light "feels" borderline-invisi-



ble to physical sight, as if your head, your eyes had slipped through an invisible curtain into another dimension without losing contact with the physical, or maybe you are looking with two kinds of eyes at the same time. You can't tell where the light above is coming from. Instead of a single streaming source, like the sun, it appears to be inherent in the whole space above. Perhaps everything there is giving off light. The light above is "thrilled," without being the least coarse or excited in large waves. Miniscule waves of "thrilled," if waves there are at all in such a quiet, subtle light. Subtle, but still definite and with a sparkling purity, as if smog could never exist in that soft radiance. Everything is so clean, so real, so calmly radiant in that light. Compared to it, your ordinary physical sight is a half-blindness, a hazy dream. You hadn't really seen that boulder or this dogwood leaf or that spider web until you saw it there.

You can look up into that overhead light, and you can look *from* up there. Then the whole angle of vision is different. Or, the angle of vision seems to be replaced by a circular, embracing, gathering sight, within which "objects" glimmer into existence as if from nowhere or from behind some veil as attention turns towards them. They pop into existence, or they lean forward into awareness, larger, more clearly outlined, nuances of color and texture standing out from the background. A small pine, a fern, or a mass of maple leaves backlit by the golden afternoon sun seems to stand forward, enlarged, for a bow or an encore when they reveal themselves in this light. Yes, maybe that's it: Some kind of revelation is happening here. They are revealing something more of themselves than they do to your ordinary city dullness.

Something is behind there, something smiling. Maybe it's even smiling *at you*—or at you and everything else, if that's too intense. Cracks and bits of glory swim to



"You can look up into that overhead light, and you can look from up there."
(Photo courtesy www.freefoto.com)

the surface like shoals of fish, turn and flash silver or gold or rainbows at your hungry eyes, then vanish. Or stay for a while, if, abolishing the hunger, you can hold them in that light.

All morning you revel quietly in a state of grace. Nothing exciting has happened. You just went for a walk. You found yourself back in the Garden. It is new and familiar at the same time. Each time it is new. Even the first time it was familiar. To the surface awareness, cut off from the rest of your being, it is a wondrous grace each time it happens. To your inner being, it is family, it is deep home.

By noon a human couple has appeared on the trail. Teenage voices ricochet through the leaves a short distance away. On the way back down the trail in the afternoon, the trance begins to fade, but the swelling stays in your chest the whole drive back to town. The memory lingers. Two lines of Sri Aurobindo drift across awareness:

The moment passed and all was as
before;
Only that deathless memory I bore.²¹

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World Union—A brief history of its aims and objectives

by Krishnaraj D. Dafle

All can be done if the God-touch is there.
—Sri Aurobindo (Savitri)

World Union as an organization was founded in 1958, in Kolkata, by Mr. Jay Holmes Smith and Mr. Anil Mukarji, drawing inspiration from Sri Aurobindo's message of 15 August 1947 and his philosophical books *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle* and *War and Self-determination*.

In 1960, as per the Mother's guidance, World Union came to Pondicherry. Since then the Mother has been guiding and shaping this movement as a part of carrying forward Sri Aurobindo's world vision and mission.

On 20 August 1964 The Mother graciously became the president of World Union and declared 20 August as World Union Day. The prominent figures who have contributed towards the growth of World Union movement under the light of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are Jay Holmes Smith, Anil Mukarji, Ambalal Patel, Surendra Mohan Ghosh, Indra Sen, Marguerite Lidchi, M. P. Pandit, Dr. M. V. Nadkarni, and N. S. Rao.

With a view to carry forward this movement, new people with new zeal and energy must come up for the cause of future humanity, so that global leadership will emerge from all the parts of the world, in every field of endeavor which will think globally and act locally in a most effective way.

Many planetary problems have gone beyond the competency of the State to control, such as international terrorism, communal and ethnic violence, civil wars, atmospheric and water pollution, environmental degradation, global warming, demographic explosion, monetary disorders, the armament race, monopolizing and wasting fossil energy resources and rare



Krishnaraj at the World Union office in Pondicherry. (Photo by Larry Seidlitz)

raw materials, absence of moral and ethical values in social and political life. Facing these problems, the existing international organizations also show an inability to achieve their best intentions, and impaired by national and private interests, are unable to defend universal peace and the cause of humanity.

The germs of violence are generated by the fact that the majority of people live in extreme poverty while only a small minority live in abundance. In considering Sri Aurobindo's message which speaks of the need for a World Union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind, the present political and economic scenario in the world gives little hope that it will be able to lead this planet towards its destiny of eternal beauty, peace and harmony.

Confronted with the impotence of the States and their international institutions, the World Union movement is to be conducted and reorganized in a most methodical and structured way. In this present global scenario we collectively aspire for eternal beauty, peace and harmony on the earth, and a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. To achieve this, World Union as an organization has the following objects:

A. To foster in all people the sense of oneness and fundamental unity of humanity—through personal example, social communication, and other activities—in the faith that it will become increasingly the basic consciousness for the whole of mankind.

B. To promote an awareness of the forces of division—hatred, jealousy, gossip, egoistic effort and struggle—and encourage their rejection by the individual and society.

C. To foster respect for all life and the practice of understanding, tolerance, active goodwill towards all, from one's family circle to society, the nation, the world.

D. To foster a sense of the Truth that is one and ever the same, and to encourage an attitude of seeking and openness towards it, that it may reshape our life, individual and social. Also to encourage the recognition that the unfolding Truth has had landmarks in cultural history of humanity and that the present epoch is a critical juncture in that unfolding.

E. To encourage the understanding that peace in the individual and in society must be founded on the growth of the sense of unity and spiritual organization of life. To promote unity, peace and integral growth on a spiritual foundation is, in brief, the purpose of World Union.

In order to help in the progress toward these aims, World Union proposes to develop an infrastructure in Pondicherry that would provide facilities for the gathering of individuals and groups from around the world working towards these aims. This infrastructure would ideally include an Institute of Global Studies and World Government, a Knowledge University, and a Sports University. World Union aims to facilitate studies and development in 12 areas, which it believes are necessary and important for the establishment of a new and sound world union: education; health; food and agriculture; environmental care; art and culture; science and technology; commerce and industry; space research; ocean studies; army; navy; and air force. We invite all interested individuals and groups who support our aims and objectives to join in our work.



Source material

A message to America

by Sri Aurobindo

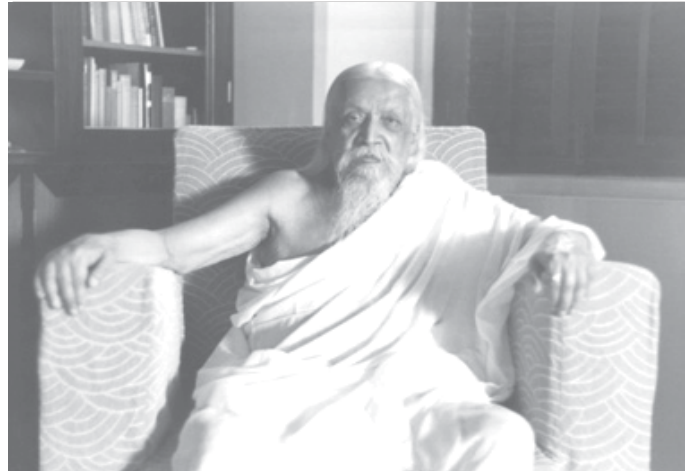
Given in response to a request for a message on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birth anniversary celebrations in New York on the 15th August 1949.

I have been asked to send on this occasion of the fifteenth August a message to the West, but what I have to say might be delivered equally as a message to the East. It has been customary to dwell on the division and difference between these two sections of the human family and even oppose them to each other; but, for myself I would rather be disposed to dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference. East and West have the same human nature, a common human destiny, the same aspiration after a greater perfection, the same seeking after something higher than itself, something towards which inwardly and even outwardly we move. There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East and the materialism of the West; but the West has had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics, the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with life and Matter and the world in which we live. East and West have always met and mixed more or less closely, they have powerfully influenced each other and at the present day are under an increasing compulsion of Nature and Fate to do so more than ever before.

There is a common hope, a common destiny, both spiritual and material, for which both are needed as co-workers. It is no longer towards division and difference that we should turn our minds, but on unity, union, even oneness necessary for the pursuit and realisation of a common ideal, the destined goal, the fulfilment towards which Nature in her beginning obscurely set out and must in an increasing light of knowledge replacing her first ignorance constantly persevere.

But what shall be that ideal and that goal? That depends on our conception of the realities of life and the supreme Reality.

Here we have to take into account that there has been, not any absolute difference but an increasing divergence between the tendencies of the East and the West. The highest truth is truth of the Spirit; a Spirit supreme above the world and yet immanent in the world and in all that exists, sustaining and leading all towards whatever is the aim and goal and the fulfilment of Nature since her obscure inconscient beginnings through the growth of consciousness is the one aspect of existence which gives a clue to the secret of our being and a meaning to the world. The East has always and increasingly put the highest emphasis on the supreme



Sri Aurobindo. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

truth of the Spirit; it has, even in its extreme philosophies, put the world away as an illusion and regarded the Spirit as the sole reality. The West has concentrated more and more increasingly on the world, on the dealings of mind and life with our material existence, on our mastery over it, on the perfection of mind and life and some fulfilment of the human being here: latterly this has gone so far as the denial of the Spirit and even the enthronement of Matter as the sole reality. Spiritual perfection as the sole ideal on one side, on the other, the perfectibility of the race, the perfect society, a perfect development of the human mind and life and man's material existence have become the largest dream of the future. Yet both are truths and can be regarded as part of the intention of the Spirit in world-nature; they are not incompatible with each other: rather their divergence has to be healed and both have to be included and reconciled in our view of the future.

The Science of the West has discovered evolution as the secret of life and its process in this material world; but it has laid more stress on the growth of form and species than on the growth of consciousness: even, consciousness has been regarded as an incident and not the whole secret of the meaning of the evolution. An evolution has been admitted by certain minds in the East, certain philosophies and Scriptures, but there its sense has been the growth of the soul through developing or successive forms and many lives of the individual to its own highest reality. For if there is a conscious being in the form, that being can hardly be a temporary phenomenon of consciousness; it must be a soul fulfilling itself and this fulfilment can only take place if there is a return of the soul to earth in many successive lives, in many successive bodies.

The process of evolution has been the development from and in inconscient Matter of a subconscious and then a conscious Life, of conscious mind first in animal life and then fully in conscious and thinking man, the highest present achievement of evolutionary Nature. The achievement of mental being is at present her highest and tends to be regarded as her final work;



but it is possible to conceive a still further step of the evolution: Nature may have in view beyond the imperfect mind of man a consciousness that passes out of the mind's ignorance and possesses truth as its inherent right and nature. There is a Truth-Consciousness as it is called in the Veda, a Supermind, as I have termed it, possessing Knowledge, not having to seek after it and constantly miss it. In one of the Upanishads a being of knowledge is stated to be the next step above the mental being; into that the soul has to rise and through it to attain the perfect bliss of spiritual existence. If that could be achieved as the next evolutionary step of Nature here, then she would be fulfilled and we could conceive of the perfection of life even here, its attainment of a full spiritual living even in this body or it may be in a perfected body. We could even speak of a divine life on earth; our human dream of perfectibility would be accomplished and at the same time the aspiration to a heaven on earth common to several religions and spiritual seers and thinkers.

The ascent of the human soul to the supreme Spirit is that soul's highest aim and necessity, for that is the supreme reality; but there can be too the descent of the Spirit and its powers into the world and that would justify the existence of the material world also, give a meaning, a divine purpose to the creation and solve its riddle. East and West could be reconciled in the pursuit of the highest and largest ideal. Spirit embrace Matter and Matter find its own true reality and the hidden Reality in all things in the Spirit. (*SABCL, Vol. 26, On Himself*, pp. 413-416)

Creating a gnostic collectivity

by the Mother

I have been asked if we are doing a collective yoga and what the conditions for the collective yoga are.

I might tell you first of all that to do a collective yoga we must be a collectivity (!) and then speak to you about the different conditions required for being a collectivity. But last night (smiling) I had a symbolic vision of our collectivity.

I had this vision in the early part of the night, and it made me wake up with a rather unpleasant impression. Then I went back to sleep and had forgotten it, and just now when I thought of the question I have been asked, the vision suddenly came back. It returned with a great intensity and so imperatively that now when I wanted to tell you exactly what kind of a collectivity we want to realise in accordance with the ideal Sri Aurobindo has given in the last chapter of *The Life Divine*—a supramental, gnostic collectivity, the only one which can practise Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga and be physically realised in a progressive collective body that grows more and more divine—the memory of this vision became so imperative that it prevented me from speaking.

Its symbol was very clear though of quite a familiar kind, so to speak, but so unmistakably realistic in its familiarity . . . If I were to

relate it to you in detail, probably you wouldn't even be able to follow; it was very complicated. It was the image of a kind of—how to put it?—of an immense hotel in which all earthly possibilities were accommodated in different rooms. And all this was in a state of constant transformation: fragments or entire wings of the building were suddenly demolished and rebuilt while all the people were still staying in them, in such a way that if a person went somewhere even inside this huge hotel, he ran the risk of not finding his room again when he wanted to get back to it! For it had been demolished and was being rebuilt on another plan. There was order, organization . . . and there was the fantastic chaos I have described, and in that there was a symbol. There was a symbol which certainly applies to what Sri Aurobindo writes here [*The Supramental Manifestation*, pp. 33-36] on the necessity of the transformation of the body, what kind of transformation should take place for life to become a divine life.

It was somewhat like this: somewhere in the centre of this huge building, a room was reserved—in the story, as it seemed, it was reserved for a mother and her daughter. The mother was a very old lady, a self-important matron with much authority and her own views on the whole organisation. The daughter had a sort of power of movement and activity which made it possible for her to be everywhere at once even while remaining in that room which was . . . well, a little more than a room; it was a sort of apartment, and its main feature was to be right in the centre. But she was in constant argument with her mother. The mother wanted to keep things as they were with the rhythm they had, that is, with precisely that habit of demolishing one thing to build another out of it, and then again demolishing another to rebuild another one—which gave the building an appearance of frightful confusion. And the daughter didn't like that and had another plan. She wanted above all to bring something quite new into this organisation, a sort of super-organisation which would make all this confusion unnecessary. Finally, as it was impossible to come to an understanding, she had left the room to go on a sort of round of inspection . . . She went on her round, saw everything, then she wanted to go back to her own room—for it was her room as well—to take some decisive action. And it was then that something rather peculiar began to happen. She remembered quite well where her room was, but each time she set out to go there by one route either the stairs disappeared or things were so changed that she could no longer recognise her way! And so she went here and there, climbed up and down, searched, went in and out . . . impossible to find the way back to her room! As all this was taking a physical appearance, which was, as I said, very familiar and very ordinary, as always in these symbolic visions, somewhere there was—how to put it?—the administration of this hotel, and a woman who was a kind of manager, who had all the keys and knew where everybody was staying. So the daughter went to this person and asked, "Can you show me the way to my room?"—"Oh, yes, certainly, it is very easy." All the people around looked at her as though saying, "How can you say that?" But she got up and, with authority, asked for a key, the key of the room, and said,



The Mother. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

"I'll take you there." Then she took all sorts of routes, but all so complicated, so bizarre! And the daughter followed her very attentively so as not to lose sight of her. And just at the moment when obviously they should have reached the place where this so-called room was, suddenly the manager—we shall call her the manager—the manager with her key . . . disappeared! And

this feeling of disappearance was so acute that . . . everything disappeared at the same time.

If . . . To help you to understand this riddle, I could tell you that the mother is physical Nature as it is and the daughter is the new creation. The manager is the mental consciousness, organiser of the world as Nature has made it until now, that is, the highest sense of organisation manifested in material Nature as it is now. This is the key to the vision. Naturally, when I woke up I knew immediately what could solve this problem which had seemed absolutely insoluble. The disappearance of the manager and her key was a clear indication that she was quite incapable of leading to its true place what could be called the creative consciousness of the new world.

I knew it but I didn't have the vision of the solution, which means that this is something which is yet to be manifested; this was not yet manifested in that building—that fantastic structure—and this is precisely the mode of consciousness which would transform this incoherent creation into something real, truly conceived, willed, executed, with a centre which is in its true place, a recognised place, with a real effective power. (*Silence*)

It is quite clear in its symbolism, in the sense that all possibilities are there, all activities are there, but in disorder and confusion. They are neither coordinated nor centralised nor unified around the single central truth and consciousness and will. And we come back, then, to . . . precisely this question of a collective yoga and the collectivity which will be able to realise it. And what should this collectivity be?

It is certainly not an arbitrary structure like those made by men, in which they put everything pell-mell, without order or reality, and the whole thing is held together only by illusory links, which were symbolised here by the walls of the hotel, and which, in fact, in ordinary human constructions—if we take as an example

a religious community—are symbolised by the monastery building, identical clothes, identical activities, even identical movements—I'll make it more clear: everybody wears the same uniform, everybody rises at the same hour, eats the same things, offers the same prayers together, etc., there is a general uniformity. And naturally, inside, there is a chaos of consciousnesses, each one going according to its own mode, for this uniformity which goes as far as an identity of belief and dogma, is an altogether illusory identity.

This is one of the most usual types of human collectivity: to be grouped, linked, united around a common ideal, a common action, a common realisation, but in a completely artificial way. As opposed to this, Sri Aurobindo tells us that a true community—what he calls a gnostic or supramental community—can exist only on the basis of the inner realisation of each of its members, each one realising his real, concrete unity and identity with all the other members of the community, that is, each one should feel not like just one member united in some way with all the others, but all as one, within himself. For each one the others must be himself as much as his own body, and not mentally and artificially, but by a fact of consciousness, by an inner realisation. (*Silence*)

That means that before hoping to realise this gnostic collectivity, each one should first become—or at least begin to become—a gnostic being. This is obvious; the individual work should go on ahead and the collective work should follow; but it so happens that spontaneously, without any arbitrary intervention of the will, the individual progress is controlled, so to speak, or held back by the collective state. Between the individual and the collectivity there is an interdependence from which one can't totally free oneself, granting that one tries. And even a person who tried in his yoga to liberate himself totally from the terrestrial and human state of consciousness, would be tied down, in his subconscious at least, to the state of the mass, which acts as a brake and actually pulls backwards. One can try to go much faster, try to drop all the weight of attachments and responsibilities, but despite everything, the realisation, even of one who is at the very summit and is the very first in the evolutionary march, is dependent on the realisation of the whole, dependent on the state of the terrestrial collectivity. And that indeed pulls one back, to such an extent that at times one must wait for centuries for the Earth to be ready, in order to be able to realise what is to be realised.

And that is why Sri Aurobindo also says, somewhere else, that a double movement is necessary, and that the effort for individual progress and realisation should be combined with an effort to try to uplift the whole mass and enable it to make the progress that's indispensable for the greater progress of the individual: a mass-progress, it could be called, which would allow the individual to take one more step forward.

And now, I shall tell you that this is why I thought it would be useful to have some group meditations, in order to work on the creation of a common atmosphere that's a little more organised than . . . my big hotel of last night! (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 9., *Questions and Answers 1957-58*, pp. 137-142)



Book Reviews

Introduction to Integral Education: An Inspirational Guide **by Sraddhalu Ranade**

Reviewed by Larry Seidnitz

I*ntroduction to Integral Education: An Inspirational Guide* by Sraddhalu Ranade (published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, 2006) shows how the guiding principles of Integral Education can be utilized in the classroom to make the education of both younger and older children interesting, enlivening, and effective. The author is scientist, educationist and scholar at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, as well as a highly regarded and well-known speaker on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's spiritual teachings. He has conducted intensive teacher-training workshops in Integral Education and value-based education all over India and abroad. The book is based on the transcripts of a series of such workshops led by the author, though the first half of the book was revised while the latter chapters were retained as they were to maintain their informal, interactive flavor. There also is available separately as a companion to the book a set of six audio CDs or a single MP3 CD. While the book is based on a series of workshops, it is a well-organized and integrated exposition, and the writing is clear and concise. Adding to the book's appeal and cohesiveness is the fact that it is beautifully illustrated with drawings that depict in clever and charming ways many of its key ideas.

Integral Education is an approach to education based on principles and guidelines laid out by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which formed the basis of the Ashram's school, the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, in which the author was educated. It is based on an entirely different view of the human being and of the educational process than traditional methods currently practiced, and as a result it involves an entire restructuring of assumptions, attitudes, approaches, and methods together with the creation and development of new ones. For example, there is a basic shift from the communication and inculcation of information to one of the training and development of faculties such as observation, comparison, formation of associations, abstract thought, creativity, concentration, memory, emotional refinement, aesthetic sensitivity, enthusiasm, will-power, fine-motor skills, and others. It also is based on a view of child as a divine soul that has taken birth in this world in order to develop its innate capacities in life after life until it can freely and fully manifest the pure divine Bliss which is its origin. As such, the integral approach is much more one of awakening and bringing into perfect expression capacities which are seen as lying undeveloped or par-

tially developed rather than one of imposing or transmitting new knowledge or skills. It also appreciates more fully than traditional approaches the differences in temperament, capacities, interests and the natural speed and directions of development in individual learners, and aims to work in harmony with these natural variations. The book examines these fundamentals and explores their specific implications for classroom activities.

The author begins by contrasting the foundational principles of traditional education and Integral Education in a way that illuminates the revolutionary, paradigmatic shift that the latter represents, enabling the reader to identify and enter into the essential spirit of the new approach. Throughout the book, the author continually keeps his eye on the basic principles of Integral Education as he shows in concrete and specific ways how they can guide and inspire learning activities and instructor-student interactions. While introductory, this book has a comprehensive feel to it because of this constant flow from basic principles to concrete methods in the classroom, its frequent contrasts between traditional and the Integral methods, and because of its treatment of the broad array of facets comprising Integral Education that deal with the many parts of the individual such as the physical, vital, emotional, logical, creative, motivational, psychic, and spiritual. It also examines the application of integral methods in a wide range of individual subjects. And it does not confine itself to examining even this rich and complex set of phenomena, but covers a variety of other important considerations such as the practical problems of integrating the new methods in an existing traditional structure, dealing with problems of discipline, methods of self-development for the teacher, and special considerations in the light of India's historical development and future possibilities. While the book illustrates how the spirit and approaches of Integral Education can be expressed in the classroom in many concrete ways and methods, we realize that these are only selected examples and that the possibilities for the enrichment of the educational process through the creative application of integral principles are endless.

While there is a stress on the foundational principles of Integral Education and how they can be given form in the classroom, there is also a more personal and experience-based flavor to the book. We feel we are in the presence of somebody who has thought deeply about the issues of Integral Education and who has seriously worked at trying to embody them in the classroom and has learned and grown from this experience. To illustrate a principle or point, the author often uses an example of his own experience with one of his students, and sometimes his own experience as a student with one of his teachers. He also shares the wisdom he has gained and the experiences he has encountered interacting with various exceptional teachers and school principals in his visits to schools throughout the country. He also brings in analogies and vivid examples to help convey abstract ideas more tangibly. We feel the author as a human being himself learning and developing on the multiple levels of being from the physical to the spiritual while trying to foster a similar growth in



others, teachers and students alike. We sense a wisdom that is based on a perceptive understanding and integration of many diverse strands of knowledge, experience, and growth in education and other fields.

Introduction to Integral Education: An Inspirational Guide is an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the subject, and will be appreciated by student and beginning teachers as well as by veterans. It would make a useful adjunct for value-education teacher-training workshops. As well as covering foundational principles and their applications in the classroom, it provides many interesting insights and practical suggestions based on the author's own unique experiences, observations and perspectives. While primarily useful for classroom teachers of children, it should also be of interest to parents who would like to better understand their children and the possibilities of an integral approach to their development and education, and to others with a general interest in the subject of education. And for those who have a more general interest in the teachings and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, it illustrates an important application of their spiritual insights into human development relevant to the world at large and its future progress.

The Horizon and Alakananda by Nishikanta, translated by Satadal

Reviewed by Larry Seidlitz

Nishakanta (1909-1973) was part of the small circle of poet-sadhaks gathered around Sri Aurobindo, whose poetry was highly regarded by Sri Aurobindo and the others. Sri Aurobindo once commented that quite suddenly a "Brahmaputra of inspiration" had opened in him. The Brahmaputra is one of India's great sacred rivers flowing from the Himalayas, 10 km. wide in places and prone to flooding. Unfortunately for many of us, Nishakanta's profusion of mystic poems—I believe there are 10 books—were written in Bengali. Fortunately, and thanks to Satadal, a poet-friend of Nishakanta's, two books have been translated into English—*The Horizon*, published in 2007, and *Alakananda*, published in 2005 (see endnotes on p. 31). Both books are available from the Sri Aurobindo Book Distribution Agency (SABDA).

Nolini Kanta Gupta, one of the most highly esteemed of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's disciples, wrote such a glowing appreciation of Nishikanta's poetry that it deserves to be quoted here. He said, "Nishikanta's poetry is the embodiment of the Mother, Her living image created through words—the image of the Empress, majestic and sublime. He has gathered together whatever possible all the riches of the world of speech—to shape this unearthly image with word-beautiful—with the most excellent and sweetest combination of syllables, words and music of sounds and all possible play of colours and lines (he was a great

painter too) in which these are expressed to reach the highest. These not only became the ornaments, apparels and outfits of the Mother; but the limbs and cells of her living body—an idol of Her spirit." (from the Translator's note in *Alakananda*, p. iii).

It seems appropriate to mention something about Nishakanta's life. He had spent time in Shantiniketan under the tutelage of Tagore, but left after a few years. Afterwards he searched for his Guru, and finally found one in the Himalayas to whom he wished to dedicate his life. However, this Guru refused him and told him that his true Guru was in Pondicherry. Nishikanta came unannounced to the Ashram in 1934. Generally a personal introduction was necessary, and at first the Mother, through an intermediary, turned him away. However, he indicated that he would not leave and sent a reply to the Mother that he intended to stay in the Ashram until his death. The Mother relented, but warned that if he stayed in the Ashram he would suffer greatly from physical problems and would not achieve fame, whereas outside in the world he could become a famous poet. Over the years Nishikanta suffered from high blood pressure, diabetes, tuberculosis, thrombosis, ulcers, and persistent cold. Nevertheless, he was a jovial person always ready with a joke and occasionally some mischief. He would say the pain did not matter because it was the Mother's word coming true. He also was a good cook and loved to eat, resulting in a pot belly. The one feature that ran counter to his rather unhealthy and unattractive appearance was his eyes, which seemed dreamy and as if looking into another dimension.

Regarding Nishikanta's poetry, we have already mentioned its mystic quality. The poems in both books are spiritual and devotional, and some deal specifically with the trials and experiences characteristic of the sadhana of the Integral Yoga. Many are addressed to the Divine. Throughout there is an emphasis on images of nature symbolic of psychological and spiritual states and movements. There is a directness in the expression; the author communicates his thought and vision clearly and unmistakably, the outer forms and symbols transparently conveying the inner thoughts and feelings.

Naturally, the quality of the translation is a major consideration in evaluating these works. Not knowing Bengali, I cannot comment on the fidelity of the translation to the original, but only generally on the felicity of the translated poems. There is little rhyme here, quite possibly this has been omitted in the translation to retain closer fidelity to the significances of the words and ideas. In general, the translated poems seem to me to be of a high caliber, among the best from Sri Aurobindo's poet-disciples. This is not to say that there are no errors or false notes in the grammar or the rhythm of particular lines, there are, but on the whole it feels as if the poetry rendered is substantially deep, inspired, and felicitous. This happy result no doubt rests on the translator being himself a poet who has written "thousands of poems," and due to his love for and close personal relation with Nishikanta.

A few examples are necessary to convey the nature and quality of the poetry expressed in these two works. I have dedicated the Poetry Room section which follows to this purpose.



The poetry room

From The calm face

All He had to say has been told,
All messages uttered,
That face in utter silence
The realisation of all mantras symbolised.
A glimmer of sweetness in His lips of a silent smile
Is the writing of a deep realisation subtle and invisible,
Draws my body, mind and life
Into the bottomless depths.
This day I have come to stand
Before that immobile Face.

Seeing all that has to be seen
His gaze indrawn kept
Appear those twin Eyes
Like the stars that never set.
Compassionate look of detachment in His eyes
Is like the horizon beyond the sky of skies;
The more I see, my consciousness
Towards Him enchanted draws.
This day I have come to stand
Before that immobile Face.

—Nishikanta (from *Alakananda*¹)

Manifestation

Thou hast freed me from the prison of darkness
Into the candid light of efflorescence.
Thou hast given new birth, a fresh adventure of life,
An expedition of unhindered stride.
Thou hast given me Thy Prasad of compassion to appease my
thirst and hunger
With food and water refreshing as nectar.
Thou hast revealed before my eyes the Sun of gold
The realized dreams of the entire universe unfold.
Today my feet are treading the desired path,
Most gratifying has become the awakened earth.
The wind from Thy lotus-grove fragrant and gentle
My life-breath inhale;
In my heartbeat I feel Thy bounty.
In the stream of blood through the artery,
Infusing Thy inspiration in that gold-wine flow
Thou hast given me consciousness aglow!
Thou hast flowered my heart, given in my voice a flute of
melodies.

Waves of music now overflows
Churning my entire being
With offerings of blooming—
O Mother! I am Thy song, Thy flower, Thy right—
Is manifested in my life.

—Nishikanta (from *Alakananda*)

The profound

Beneath an abysmal darkness
In depths profound
In the heart of immobility still
My poet is seated sound.

Nobody knows how
His imagination blooms,
In that profundity incomprehensible
Eternity looms.

His neglect disinterested causes
A myriad worlds to fall;
The sun and the moon to set and rise
Like a transitory bubble.

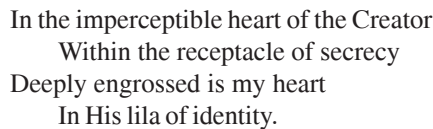
Birth and death at the same instant
Trembles in his grip dire;
On his colourless canvas flash
Lakhs of springs their colour.

All my time I spend there
All the periods of the day,
There in that depth profound
With my poet I play.

Many a dream form and vanish
From that immense sleep
Creations crumble, creations come into being
In that heart free from grief.

Nobody knows how his thoughts
In which mood come into play;
Which of the gems are deeply absorbed
Which ones shine to display!

From those lips in utter silence
What a song I hear!
And I write picturesque
Rising and setting in colour!



All my time I spend there
Timeless periods of the day;
There in that depth unfathomable
With my poet I play.

—Nishikanta (from *Alakananda*)

Eternal

In some temple eternal my prayer rings
With the unsounded blowing of a conchshell,
 Reciting its own mantra
 In an unperturbed solemn voice—
A persistent yearning of ananda greeting tirelessly
The stone-image of Shiva.

Like some desert eternal my austerities
In an intense hunger of noon
 Pass the solitary hours
 In the vast arid expanse—
Which carries the solar fire of the infinite in its heart extended
 upto the horizon,
In each part of sand shivers the longing of the whole.

In some palace eternal my meditation
Burns like the still flame of a lamp,
 That flame of whiteness
 Carries the glow of calmness—
Sees like the eyes of a seer, the moon and stars
Come and go exposing the riches of an emperor's dream.

—Nishikanta (from *The Horizon*²)

Silent Prayer

O Mother! To the lotus-bud lying under Thy feet
I will not utter fickle-words impatiently.
I will now pray with a silent mind.
I will pass my time remembering Thee with a quiet heart,
Set my awaiting with silent songs,
I will not disturb the peace of the lake of Thy lila.
I will now pray with a silent mind.

For the light of Thy dawn with a maddened mind
Aimless I will not wander,

Will not ever be agitated hearing a note bereft of hope.
Remain motionless with eyes open
Setting my gaze on the eastern horizon
All day I shall prepare myself for Thy adoration at night.
I will now pray with a silent mind.

Night is dark I know, sure also of the coming morn,
Know that the sun of Thy light with its blazing glow
Will set my awakened faith aglow.
Know that the bonds will snap when it is the right time
The lotus-bud aspired for will blossom . . .
That nectar will moisten this sadhana of mine.
I will now pray with a silent mind.

I am as if a lamp, carrying in my bosom
An unwavering flame tender and soothing, engrossed in dream,
I know, Thou shalt come and kindle the flame of aspiration.
The lamp knows that in its heart
The auspicious moment for a bright carnival lies in secret,
Knows that its earthen body will the flame of gold find.
I will now pray with a silent mind.

No trace of any doubt, no resolve, nor any haste.
 I know for sure that I will get . . . get Thee,
 Shall merge in the ananda longed for by getting Thee.
 I have tuned my life's vina . . . and its wires
 Will blaze with the touch of Thy fingers—
 With pure melody fill my body and mind.
 I will now pray with a silent mind.

I came driving my boat across a huge length of time,
Swayed in rhythm with the waves of storm;
This morning at Thy mooring I come.
I have struck the sail, not operating the rudder,
Waiting for Thee at Thy shore—
Touching Thy land's sacred dust.
I will now pray with a silent mind.

I have traversed the path of ages to come to Thee today,
 Standing before the closed door of Thy palace.
 Have kept myself speechless at one corner.
 When the hour will strike, Thou shalt come Thyself
 To open the closed door with a sweet smile,
 Then shall I frequent with joy in Thy crystal-palace.
 I will now pray with a silent mind.

—Nishikanta (from *The Horizon*)

1. *Alakananda*, published by Smt. Maya Chattodhyay, Sri Aurobindo Sthan, Shivachal, Birati, Kolkata India, 2005.

2. *The Horizon*, published by Sri Manik Lall, Trustee, Sri Aurobindo Sthan, Sivachal, Birati, Kolkata, India, 2007.



Apropos

Small beginnings are of the greatest importance and have to be cherished and allowed with great patience to develop. —Sri Aurobindo

Man finds that God is too slow to answer his prayers. God finds that man is too slow to receive His influence. But for the Truth-Consciousness all is going on as it ought to go. —The Mother

People are where they are because that's exactly where they really want to be . . . whether they'll admit that or not. —Earl Nightingale

People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own soul. —Carl Gustav Jung

Do everything with a mind that lets go. Don't accept praise or gain or anything else. If you let go a little you will have a little peace; if you let go a lot you will have a lot of peace; if you let go completely you will have complete peace. —Ajahn Chah

Outside ideas of right doing and wrong doing there is a field. I'll meet you there. —Rumi

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves. —Carl Jung

Let your life lightly dance on the edges of time like dew on the tip of a leaf. —Rabindranath Tagore

We shall not cease from exploring,
And the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
—T.S. Eliot

The One and the All mingle and move without discriminating. Live in this awareness and you'll stop worrying about not being perfect. —Seng-T'San

For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation. —Rainer Maria Rilke

Nirvana or lasting enlightenment or true spiritual growth can be achieved only through persistent exercise of real love. —M. Scott Peck

The less you open your heart to others, the more your heart suffers. —Deepak Chopra

The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them. —Thomas Merton

Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh and the greatness which does not bow before children. —Kahlil Gibran

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. —The 14th Dalai Lama

How do you go about finding anything? By keeping your mind and heart on it. Interest there must be and steady remembrance. To remember what needs to be remembered is the secret of success. You come to it through earnestness. —Nisargadatta Maharaj

Silence is a great help to a seeker after truth. In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest after Truth, and the soul requires inward restfulness to attain its full height. —Mohandas K. Gandhi

You are a child of the universe, no less than the moon and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. —Max Ehrmann

Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself. —Chinese Proverb

Do what you feel in your heart to be right —for you'll be criticized anyway. You'll be damned if you do, and damned if you don't. —Eleanor Roosevelt

The same stream of life that runs through the world runs through my veins night and day in rhythmic measure. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth into numberless waves of flowers. —Rabindranath Tagore

When you understand one thing through and through, you understand everything. —Shunryu Suzuki

You wander from room to room hunting for the diamond necklace that is already around your neck! —Rumi

Let this be my last word, that I trust in your love. —Rabindranath Tagore

Not to know at large of things remote from use, obscure and subtle, but to know that which before us lies in daily life, is the prime wisdom. —John Milton

Sagehood has nothing to do with governing others but is a matter of ordering oneself. Nobility has nothing to do with power and rank but is a matter of self-realization. Attain self-realization, and the whole world is found in the self. Happiness has nothing to do with wealth and status, but is a matter of harmony. —Lao-tze

What is to give light must endure burning. —Viktor Frankl

Zen opens a man's eyes to the greatest mystery as it is daily and hourly performed; it enlarges the heart to embrace eternity of time and infinity of space in its every palpitation; it makes us live in the world as if walking in the garden of Eden. —D. T. Suzuki

We all stand in line for the highest Gift. —Hafiz