

# Collaboration

Winter 2009/Spring 2010

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 34, No. 3



**Sri Aurobindo with disciples in Pondicherry**

**Sri Aurobindo by Kailas Jhaveri •  
Mother's way with flowers by Richard Pearson •  
Emotion and its transformation by Larry Seidlitz •  
A way forward by James Anderson •  
Current Affairs • AV Almanac • Source Material • Poetry • Apropos**



## About the cover

Group photo circa 1915-1918. Lower row, from left to right—Nag Bijoy Kumar (unconfirmed), Sri Aurobindo, Nolini Kanta Gupta; upper row from left to right—Moni (Suresh Chakravarty), Domont (unconfirmed), Nagen. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

## The authors and poets

**Anandi**, hailing from Spain, joined Auroville in 1995, and has been active in administrative working groups such as Planning & Development, Working Committee and Pour Tous. She has been co-instrumental in forming the Auroville Board of Services, represented in the Human Resource team and Budget Coordination Committee.

**James Anderson**, of Anglo-Irish descent, lives in Pondicherry and is part of the editorial team of NAMAHA, a journal that examines Integral Health, published by the Sri Aurobindo Society.

**Dhyaanavati** (hridalaya@gmail.com) is from Montenegro, and studied and worked in the field of psychology in both Croatia and California. Her two books of poetry—*Throbbing of his Seed in the Tomb of Mine, Womb of Light*; and *Recovering the Sacred*—were published in 2009 by Gnana-garbhya Awareness Project, Bengaluru, India. The poems included here are from the latter book.

**Kailas Jhaveri** (richardkailas@gmail.com) has been a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram since 1964. Her biography, *I am with you*, from which this article was taken, was published by the Ashram in 2007. Her address is Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry 605002.

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**David Nightingale**, who is from the United Kingdom, studied architecture there and in Germany. He settled in Auroville in 1997 to begin his further education.

**Anie Nunnally** (aniemere@gmail.com) has served on the board of the Foundation for World Education and has been an active member of the East-West Cultural Center in Los Angeles, where she currently resides.

**Richard Pearson** (richardkailas@gmail.com) has been a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram since childhood. He is an expert on flowers and plants, and is a contributor to the book *Flowers and Their Messages*.

**Larry Seidlitz** (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is a faculty member of SACAR in Pondicherry, and also editor of *Collaboration*.

The late **Sundaram** was a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1945 until his passing in 1991. He wrote in Gujarati in various genres, and also held talks and spiritual camps in Gujarat. We have selected three poems from his book, *Selected Poems of Sundaram* (translated by Dhanavanti), Gujarat Sahitya Academy, Gandhinagar, 2001.

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## From the office of Collaboration

In this issue we mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry on 4 April 1910 with Kailas Jhaveri's inspirational biographical sketch of his life and work. In this first essay of our Chronicles section, Kailas recounts the key events of Sri Aurobindo's life while also conveying something of their inner significance. This is not an academic biography, but is one written by a devotee who has a close understanding of the behind-the-scenes circumstances and significances of events pertaining to Sri Aurobindo's life and work. It is written with the love and finesse of a disciple.

The second article in our Chronicles section is by Richard Pearson on Mother's way with flowers. Based on a talk given in Auroville, this essay recounts interesting anecdotes of Mother's way with flowers, some of which she shared directly with the author. Richard's deep relation with flowers, which the Mother helped develop and nurture in him, gives him a special insight into their significance and possibilities which he shares with us here. He brings together many references to Mother's experiences with flowers from diverse writings, and combines them with his own personal understanding to convey something of their charm and undreamed possibilities for us all.

This is followed by two essays which focus on the dynamics of sadhana in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. The first, written by me, Larry Seidlitz, explores Sri Aurobindo's view of emotions, their difficulties and possibilities, and how they can be transmuted in the course of yogic practice. Drawing on the concepts of ancient Indian psychology, Sri Aurobindo's treatment of emotions is deeper and more comprehensive than anything afforded by Western psychology. In addition to providing a better understanding of emotions, Sri Aurobindo gives us the keys to overcome their limitations and transmute them into an expression of Ananda, the divine delight of Being which is at the summit of spiritual experience.

The second essay, by James Anderson, focuses on the body and how its limitations can be used as an instrument of sadhana. As intimated in this article, James has faced the unique challenge of a degenerative illness, though as he suggests, how it is viewed is a subjective process of overriding importance. At the heart of this psychological process is surrender, but it also involves a detached consciousness in contact with the Divine Force which can act on the body and infuse the higher consciousness into it. With its natural resistance and slower rhythm, this takes much patience and persistence, but it does produce its effect. At the same time, when centered in the psychic or higher consciousness, a harmony and natural flow is established throughout the being, extending to the body itself. James shows us how our limitations can be utilized as a gift from the Divine to grow in consciousness and advance on the spiritual path.

In addition to these featured articles, we have updates on activities at various U.S. centers, and announcements of upcoming conferences. In AV almanac, three substantial articles examine current activities in Auroville. The first is on the dreamcatcher's forum, which is a creative approach toward problem-solving on various challenges facing Auroville. The second describes the history and present healthy status of the Pour Tous distribution center, which provides needed food, toiletries and home items to participants in exchange for a fixed part of their monthly maintenance allocated to them by the community. The third article describes the work at Kenji's woodworking shop in Auroville, which builds furniture and other items in the Japanese style—a style reminiscent of George Nakashima's work so highly prized by the Mother—and which exemplifies the perfection and beauty in work idealized in the Integral Yoga. We also have Source Material from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the fascinating subject of death and rebirth; several excellent poems by two exceptional poets in our Poetry room; and a collection of inspiring quotations in Apropos.

### The photographers

Sebastian Cortes is an American professional photographer living in Auroville. See his exquisite photographs of India and Italy on his website: [www.sebastiancortes.com](http://www.sebastiancortes.com) and a brief interview about his life and work at [www.auroville.org/journals&media/avtoday/April\\_07/photographer.htm](http://www.auroville.org/journals&media/avtoday/April_07/photographer.htm). His photographs of furniture included in this issue were selected from Kenji's website: [www.japanesearthfurniture.com](http://www.japanesearthfurniture.com) and provided courtesy Kenji and Valeria Matsumoto.

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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: Lynda Lester, President; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; Chandresh Patel, secretary. Members: Vishnu Eschner, and John-Robert Cornell.

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





## Current Affairs

### News from the Cultural Integration Fellowship

by Sandy Kepler

CIF promotes the concepts of universal religion, cultural harmony and creative self-unfoldment, remaining strong and independent as one of America's most prestigious and oldest organizations grounded in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. Pioneer-in-America Integral Philosophy proponent, Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, continues to be revered as the dynamic founding force behind both CIF and the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, CA. "The Fellowship" celebrates its 59th year with a fundraising dinner on Saturday June 5<sup>th</sup> at the CIF building on Fulton and 3rd Ave., across from beautiful Golden Gate Park. Please join us for this gala event!

Since the passing of Mrs. Bina Chaudhuri in Dec. 2006, Rita Chaudhuri Pease, the Chaudhuri's eldest daughter, has provided able and wise leadership as the Fellowship's President. With assistance from her sister Shipra Narruhn, Rita is spearheading the re-printing of one of Dr. Chaudhuri's earliest written works, *Prayers of Affirmation, A Guide to Daily Meditation*. A longer-range CIF project includes preserving the archival, taped lectures of Dr. Chaudhuri's and other well-known Integral Yoga scholars such as M.P. Pandit, transferring them to CD's and developing a distribution plan.

In the past two years, the Cultural Integration Fellowship building has been renovated and a spirit of renewal is in the air! CIF continues to offer lectures and Sunday morning cultural programs on a wide variety of interfaith topics, including celebrating the birthdays of Martin Luther King, Jr. with African-American politics scholar, Dr. James Lance Taylor from the Jesuit school, U. of SF, as well as the Mother's birthday on February 21 and the birthday of Rabindranath Tagore.

Vishnu Eschner delivered the talk and power-point presentation on the occasion of Mother's birthday, entitled "Integral Yoga, the Mother and New Models of Transformation." Many guests from Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, the Ashram in Lodi, CA, attended Vishnu's inspiring talk.

CIF is co-sponsoring an upcoming event with the Lodi Ashram and the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) on Friday, April 9 at an all-day symposium celebrating CIIS' Founder's Day and the legacy of Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri. Talks and workshops are being organized by CIF Board member, Dr. Bahman Shirazi, who is also Archivist and Professor at CIIS. The symposium will feature several CIF community scholars, including Dr. Kartik Patel, Dr. Kundan Singh, and Dr. James Ryan.

CIF continues to foster close ties with SACHI (Society for the Arts and Cultural Heritage of India), the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, and other groups inspired by Indian traditions. Upcoming Sunday talks include "The Sacred Waters: Myth, Personification and Imagery of River Ganga" by Dr. Nalini Rao; and Buddhist-inspired topics: "Honoring the Feminine in All Sentient Beings" by Ani Tenzen Lhadron, and "Activating the Principles of Wisdom and Compassion" by Dr. Anne Teich.

Dr. Haridas and Mrs. Bina Chaudhuri will be honored at CIF's annual memorial event for its founders with a concert of Indian vocal music on Sunday, June 27, lovingly offered by Sri Karunamayee from Sri Aurobindo's New Delhi. Lastly, CIF supports the efforts of California Institute of Integral Studies to raise money for a fully-funded chair in Asian Philosophy and Religion in Dr. and Bina Chaudhuri's name. CIF members also attend CIIS's annual April dinner to enhance the Chaudhuri endowment when a community member whose work creates bridges toward Asian-American understanding is honored. Live Indian music at the annual endowment dinner is accompanied on tabla by the Chaudhuri's son, Aushim, enhancing the Chaudhuri legacy of supporting Asian arts, as well.

For more information, contact administrative assistant, Sandy Kepler at CIF, 2650 Fulton St., San Francisco, Ca. 94118; (415) 668-1559; or email us at: [culturalintegrationfellowship@sbcglobal.net](mailto:culturalintegrationfellowship@sbcglobal.net), and visit us on the web: [www.culturalintegrationfellowship.org](http://www.culturalintegrationfellowship.org).

### Activities at the East- West Cultural Center - Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles

by Anie Nunnally

The East West Cultural Center-The Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles continues its work of hosting visitors for meditation in the Reliquary Room of Sri Aurobindo as well as for overnight stays, attending to book sales, and organizing workshops and lectures. Our weekly satsang of study of a major work of Sri Aurobindo, discussion and meditation is held each Saturday from 5-7 p.m. in the center library. All four major darshan days are celebrated with chanting, readings, meditation and prasad. Karma yoga days with community members are scheduled as needed.

A special birthday celebration will be held on May 16th for our founder, Dr. Judith Tyberg (Jyotipriya), at which time we will announce the completion of a website in her memory consisting of a biographical text with photos. Many people who knew and worked with her will be offering their recollections. We will also show a recent DVD Interview with Professor Arabinda Basu, a long-time friend and mentor of Jyotipriya.

Our New Year began with a visit from Aurovilians, Wolfgang Schmidt-Reinecke and Soleil Lithman. Soleil gave a presentation on her Hladina methods and the next day she facilitated an all-day



workshop. Eight women participated in the workshop which was such a powerful experience for all attendees that she has been invited back some time within the year.

Also in January we had a visit from June Maher, founder of the Auroville Association, who spoke about her continued work for Auroville and how the Association was formed that led to the various Auroville Internationals worldwide.

Upcoming visits are planned with Dakshina and Angelo of the Lodi Ashram and Santosh Krinsky of Lotus Light publications. Mitra Vahradian will visit in May and Richard Hartz from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in July. In June we have booked a concert with Nadaka and Gopika from Auroville, who will share with us their beautiful music of Sanskrit chants and mantras. Nadaka, a professional guitarist, will also perform ragas transcribed for the guitar.

We extend a warm welcome to all to join us for our programs and darshan celebrations. Our phone number is 310-390-9083.

## Briefs

**AUM 2010** will be held July 8-11 at Menla Mountain Retreat and Conference Center, Phoenicia, NY. For registration and details, see <http://matagiri.org/events.htm> or call 845-679-5358.

**Sri Aurobindo Center Southeast** will be hosting the Sri Aurobindo Integral Yoga Retreat 2010 Conference July 14-18 at Furman University campus, Greenville, SC. For registration and details, visit [www.sriurobindoyogaretreat.com](http://www.sriurobindoyogaretreat.com) or call 864-248-1571.

**The CIIS Founders Symposium on Integral Consciousness – 2010** is being held on April 9<sup>th</sup> at the CIIS Mission Building, Namaste Hall (3rd floor) 1453 Mission St., in San Francisco. This annual symposium provides a forum for CIIS community members and friends to exchange and deepen their understanding of integral consciousness, its evolution, and its relationship to the current planetary challenges and transformational processes. There will be presentations on integral education, integral consciousness studies, integral psychology and various workshops. For information see: <http://ciislibrary.wordpress.com/2010-symposium>, or contact Bahman Shirazi, [bshirazi@ciis.edu](mailto:bshirazi@ciis.edu); (415) 575-6253.

**Institute for Wholistic Education** ([www.aurobindo.net](http://www.aurobindo.net)) is offering all USA Centers a set of the US editions of Sri Aurobindo's writings, including the Sri Aurobindo Selected Writings CD ROM at no charge other than shipping costs. This offer is to assist Centers who would like to expand their libraries.

The Institute continues to support daily feeds on twitter about Sri Aurobindo's Yoga [www.twitter.com/santoshk1](http://www.twitter.com/santoshk1) as well as daily systematic study of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* at <http://sriurobindostudies.wordpress.com>.

The M.P. Pandit website ([www.mppandit.com](http://www.mppandit.com)) continues to expand now featuring streaming lectures, readings, chants and mantras including a number of the talks on the Synthesis of Yoga which M.P. Pandit gave at Auroville in the early 1970s.

For information, contact the Institute at: 3425 Patzke Lane, Racine, WI 53405; 262-619-1798, [santoshk@msn.com](mailto:santoshk@msn.com).

## AV almanac

### Catching the dream

by David Nightingale

*The following article gratefully acknowledges all the dreamcatchers who have contributed to this process. An earlier version appeared in the journal Ritam, published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research, Auroville.*

Over a period of four years the aim of the dreamcatcher forum has been to help nurture the manifestation of the galaxy plan of Auroville in a spirit of Human Unity, whilst utilising the various ground realities to stimulate the emergence of all-embracing solutions.

The underlying belief is that through developing our capacities to listen to each other and to work together, we thereby create a more positive environment where win/lose situations become simply unacceptable and where classic win/win solutions are transformed further into win/win/win opportunities. This initially requires participants to embrace the possibility of 'both/and' solutions as opposed to 'either/or' decisions and further that they remain open to key insights with which to 'tai-chi' difficult situations so that the resulting solutions transform a seemingly intractable problem into a profound opportunity.

The primary means used to achieve these ends is through the exploration of tools and techniques which can help to synthesize a positive group expression, which would delineate inspiring and uplifting architectural and urban design parameters to lead us inexorably in the direction of building a 'yogic' city. The hope is that the township might thus develop in such a way that it would nurture an increased awareness and consciousness in its inhabitants, and that at some point in the future it might be as obvious through perceiving its atmosphere that one is in Auroville, as it is obvious from its surroundings that one is in Venice.

The initial seed of this exploration was planted in the summer of 2005, when it became clear to a number of architects that although they were working on various studies to design large areas of the future township, most of these attempts were distinctly lacking over-arching parameters which might help to produce a cohesive final product.

After experiencing a number of more-or-less typical brainstorming sessions, and partly due to the difficulty of finding a common time when all the participants were available, the *dreamcatchers* hallmark of holding sessions at sunrise on different rooftops around Auroville was born. Not only are most people available in principle to attend sessions at this time, but the half-light and subsequent sunrise also help to inculcate an atmosphere of receptivity to whichever glimpses of the higher vision



wish to emerge.

Each session begins with the chanting of an 'opening' mantra and a period of silent contemplation. This prepares the space for an initial check-in round where all those who felt called to come that morning have a chance to share their insights on the theme at hand, after which the circle is open for further input. A 'talking ball' is used not only to help maintain a space for listening, but also to attempt to limit our tendency of rushing to speak as soon as someone else has finished, in that only the one holding it may speak and it is returned slowly to the centre for the next one to take.

A few basic rules also help to guide our weekly explorations—the first being that there is no censoring of any idea no matter how unlikely it is (either one's own or anyone else's), secondly there is no discussion (which helps to maintain a quiet, introspective space) and lastly, attendance is 100 percent voluntary (so everyone who turns up for a session really wishes to be there).

In the week between sessions everyone is free to write-up their perceptions and share them with others through the mailing list. Eventually the clearest of these 'pearls' (aka 'bullets') are written up as separate sheets for community feedback in the Dream Spaces.

Over the first few months of this experiment a wide range of topics were touched upon, covering all aspects of the future township, but at some point it became clear that when we allowed the same theme to run over a few weeks a number of more subtle insights began to emerge, and in many cases a point was reached where a particular solution or approach simply percolated through the filters of our perception. The experience is an interesting combination of 'fission' and 'fusion' reactions, where seemingly disparate and diverse pieces converge into a new sense of purpose and direction for the topic under consideration.

Since many planning themes in Auroville had become politically sensitive over the years, *dreamcatchers* decided to focus on the somewhat neutral theme of 'entrance' for their first public interaction, and it was at this point that the *dreamweaving* process emerged.

Since we needed a corollary to the morning sessions, we began to have 'sunset' *dreamweaving* sessions to explore more interactive techniques, with the aim of hosting the first Dream Space in the community. One approach the modern world has excelled in is hierarchical structures, with a manager or visionary at the helm and an army of people doing their bidding; however in *dreamweaving* we wish to move beyond not only this paradigm, but also the reaction to it of seeking watered-down consensual solutions. It is a case of seeking the 'highest common factor' through a synthesis of intuitions emanating from the hearts and minds of those present, rather than cobbling together the 'lowest common



*An early dreamcatcher session at the US Pavilion in Auroville's International Zone. The author is on the front left. (Photo courtesy the dreamcatchers forum)*

denominator' emerging from the suppression of individual expression to land up with that on which everyone has been able to agree.

As an example, after a fairly typical brainstorming session where each of those present sits quietly by themselves for 15-20 minutes exploring ideas on how to present the Dream Space, people then come together to share their insights with the larger forum. In the ensuing discussion, the aim is not to see who fights hardest for 'their' vision or 'their' idea, but to truly aim for the emergence of that

which wants to happen. This can of course sound not only somewhat esoteric but also rather unlikely; however a disarmingly simple formula has helped us move in the right direction.

Anyone who feels strongly drawn to a particular solution or approach, either their own or someone else's, can suggest its implementation to the others and offers to 'carry' that part of the process. The acceptance of this responsibility gives the person concerned the prerogative to guide it in the direction of their choosing; however if someone feels strongly that any aspects of this approach would be wrong they are free to express this, and the initiator is obliged to modify it in such a way so as to get unanimous support (or at least sufficiently to not have anyone feel the need to stop that particular part of the process). The key ingredient in this is not to just block something for the sake of it, but to truly feel into the veracity and strength of the proposal, and given both time and an open attitude our experience is that it invariably leads to richer more holistic solutions. The process continues to build up layer by layer on its strengths until a final plan or product emerges.

I think it is fair to say that although none of our processes could yet be described as 'perfect,' in each case beautiful environments have been created where various degrees of synthesis were achieved, while the sense has definitely grown of an improvement in the quality of our group decisions.

The first Dream Space occurred within the 'Certitude triangle' on the theme of 'Entrance,' the second one was in Revelation on the theme of 'Green,' and a third has been prepared on 'Mobility' and we hope to manifest this in 2010 somewhere on the Crown. In each case we have moved closer to the more practical issues within the township and the Zones, whilst using the opportunity to refine our techniques and build up a body of work and awareness as a strong foundation for the more challenging subjects.

Over this period of *dreamcatching* further opportunities have also emerged to help us move slowly in the direction of concrete manifestation. After the first 'Entrance' Dream Space we received an invitation from the Visitors Center to explore the new visitor access, where it has been envisioned since many years that guests might park near the tar road and approach Auroville





over one of the dams in the canyon below Aurodam. From this work a three-phase plan emerged, answering not only the short and mid-term solutions required in the vicinity, but also integrating a new 'public' entrance to Auroville at the edge of the Green Belt next to Irumbai village, as initially suggested in the Dream Space. This would not only help to stop a large percentage of the polluting traffic from entering Auroville, but would also provide the opportunity for visitors to experience different aspects of the Green Belt in an environmentally friendly way whilst simultaneously preparing them for a deeper experience of Auroville.

All along it has been an important aim of dreamcatchers to create a process which is welcoming to people who are not 'professionals' in planning and architecture. A big step was also made to share these techniques with non-Aurovilians through a 'design studio' which was held over a two-week period in in Verité community in 2007. Twenty extremely enthusiastic 'guinea-pigs' gave themselves to a totally new approach to 'group' design, and the feedback on this from both participants and observers was extremely positive.

On top of the techniques already mentioned, a further tool was explored during this workshop through the adaptation of the well-known 'Conversation Cafe®' methodology to more design-oriented goals. The key elements in this remain the same as in *dreamcatching*—no censoring of ideas, respectful listening and a moving away from the ideas that this concept is "my" concept. However this is a more dynamic exercise and prepares one for actions to be manifested. It involved participants dividing up around tables into groups of four and then devoting twenty minutes to the exploration of different solutions to a specific design brief through sketches, doodles, quick models and write-ups, after which all but one person from each group change tables. The ones who remained behind then take a couple of minutes to brief the new group, and the co-creative process continues from there. This process occurs three times over the course of an hour, after which the full range of solutions are presented to the whole room and elaborated further. This technique not only fired-up the enthusiasm of the attendees early on in the process, but in conjunction with the more introspective *dreamcatcher* process, offered a rich cross-fertilization of ideas and possibilities from which to harvest more collective holistic solutions.

In 2008 *dreamcatchers* also took up the challenge to envision an alternative solution to the Crown, which we felt should not only strengthen the original form of the galaxy plan but should also encourage a greater interweaving of routes within and around the Crown area, as opposed to the development of a road which can often act as a barrier. 'Crownways' thus became a great opportunity to use the tools we have developed collectively to incorporate a number of dreamcatcher parameters in one concentrated area of the township.

The latest focus of our attention has been the International Zone (IZ). After a request from AVI-USA to see if it might be possible to synthesise and transcend the different approaches which have emerged over the last decade or two, we spent a few months

watching the sun rise in various corners of the IZ while listening to the land and its wildlife to see what would come. Although we felt that some deeper sense of the form and function of the IZ did emerge, since dreamcatching is something we all do in our 'free' time we unfortunately hit our first collective wall and have all been too busy to go deeper into it. With any luck this situation will change as 2010 unfolds, and we will not only be able to manifest the Mobility Dream Space but take up from where we left off in the IZ as well.

*Dreamcatching* or *dreamcatchers* as an open-source planning forum is very much a "work in progress," open to anyone for any amount of time. We have no fixed agenda or finished product in mind. As we evolve new ways of communicating and working together, it leaves the path open and flexible for greater opportunities and challenges, in researching a living embodiment of an actual human unity. If nothing else, the past four years has brought much joy and learning along the way, nourishing our work and life in Auroville.

## Auroville's Pour Tous Distribution Center

by Anandi

*Mother, if one day Auroville is to function fluently for need and demand without the internal exchange of money, perhaps the time has come to create that 'proper channel.'*

This request from 23 year old Aurovillian Claire in 1972 started off the rather unique and central 'Pour Tous' development in Auroville, which is an essential feature of the city till date. Claire wrote about that time:

*After living for more than a year in Auroville, I had become keenly aware of the need for an Aurovillian service dedicated to supplying Aurovilians with what they needed in their various fields of activity, so that they could be free to concentrate on the work to be done. I very much wanted to see such a service established, as individuals having to go to Pondicherry or Madras for supplies wasted much time. When, on top of that, I read Mother's definition of 'money,' I was determined to put my energies into creating that financial protection around such a supply service.*

Having read out the proposal and follow-up note to the Mother, Shyamsundar indicated later that he had never seen Mother so happy, and that she said excitedly, while pointing her finger in a tapping motion, "*C'est ça! C'est ça! Donnez-moi une papier et stylo!*" ("*This is it! This is it! Give me a paper and pen!*"). Mother then wrote in large letters 'FOR ALL' and in small-



er letters 'Pour Tous' which by now have become a quite familiar feature in the township.

This is how a long, interesting and still evolving process started. The first 'FOR ALL/ Pour Tous' center opened on 28 February 1974 in the Aspiration settlement, when Auroville was just six years old. The service then provided was only for food and (very) basic supplies. The place had a joyous atmosphere, with a small team working in constant 'surrender' to provide the best possible customer service with the means available at the time, based on the principle of sharing among the residents whatever was available.

Over the years, the Pour Tous experiment expanded and evolved, going through various ways of functioning. At par with the general pace of our small society, eventually the general trend may have veered into a perhaps less collective-oriented undertaking and the overall feel and functioning of the place became somewhat reminiscent of a consumer-oriented supermarket. As per the creative laws of Auroville, when a good number of Aurovilians become sufficiently dissatisfied about a certain situation, a will is found to overcome the challenge at hand. A wheel was set in motion, very gradually, toward a two-pronged approach, resulting in what is now the Pour Tous Purchasing Service (PTPS, still in Aspiration) and the Pour Tous Distribution Centre (PTDC, near Solar Kitchen, in the city center).

It was around 1996 that this new aspiration from within the community started emerging with the intent to revive the spirit of a service that caters to the *needs* of Aurovilians in a way that would be more in line with the original idea of *sharing* of goods available. After years and years of exploration and debate among a large number of Aurovilians who were committed to the idea, PTDC started in March 2006 with 124 participants (109 adults and 15 children) and a monthly turnover of IRS. 3.5 lakhs. Presently, as of December 2009, there are 573 participants (523 adults and 50 children) and a monthly turnover of IRS. 11.10 lakhs.

## How it works

At the time of starting, almost four years ago, the centralized financial bodies of Auroville very cautiously allocated a first budget for the maintenance of the service. This allowed it to function purely on an at-cost basis for the products distributed, without charging an extra margin. Still many had difficulty in believing that the system would work and had questions about collectively supporting a service which would benefit only those who agree to join as participants on a fixed monthly contribution for that service.

Now, three and a half years later, the experiment is still developing and progressing, learning and adapting, but always has a positive balance—both financially as well as in terms of people's participation and support!

As for its participants, the center collects a fixed part from the monthly maintenance allocated to Aurovilians for their personal needs, as well as contributions from those Aurovilians who maintain themselves. Every month these contributions constitute a

collective pot from where the food, toiletries and home items are purchased, and subsequently displayed and distributed over the month. The participants are responsible for taking goods according to their needs and for keeping their 'usage' in balance as much as possible with the budget allocated for each of them. On an average, about half of the participants will exceed their budget while the other half will underutilize it (this naturally varies a bit every month). Generally things are evened out and balanced at the end of each month and, at times, even a small amount is left over which will be used to cover stock adjustments and for the benefit of participants by doing some small improvements. Many people consciously under-use, or live very simply, allowing that others with less flexibility can utilize more. There are quite a few participants who because of their increased family needs could never manage before but now can make ends meet.

No prices are shown on the products and no bills are given. Updates of the usage of each one's budget are thrice a month posted at the PTDC notice board, so that participants can be aware of their general usage pattern. Sometimes a participant has to be reminded about his/her usage of the service and how the system functions, but over-use is rarely serious. Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages to this system. We cannot claim to have found a perfect solution without money playing some role in it. However, it does give the possibility of participating in a material sharing in a more fraternal and money-detached economic system, and in which solidarity plays a key role. Moreover, keeping one's needs within a monthly budget helps one to be more disciplined and learn to discern one's real needs.

The center is managed by seven Aurovilians maintained by Auroville's maintenance fund. It is open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., from Monday to Saturday. The items distributed are carefully selected with preference given to Auroville goods and produce, to organically and environmentally friendly produced food and products wherever possible, and all at the best available price. These make for a range of products that cover the average basic needs and some extra necessities. There are no invitingly flashy packages or sales promotional advertising, so indicative of a consumerist approach, and no luxury items are distributed. Feedback on goods and services is constantly invited and welcomed. The cost of all goods is the exact cost as charged by the supplier, and efforts are being made to get discounts as much as possible. Nothing extra is charged.

The center also offers ready-made, nutritious meals that participants can pick up in their tiffins and bring home to eat, quietly, without the hassle of preparing it. The kitchen preparing these 'home made,' simple and tasty, international and innovative lunches, sauces, drinks and snacks, functions until now entirely on volunteer support. A good number of Aurovilians offer their help in cooking on regular basis, many times assisted by guest volunteers. Our sweet kitchen is enormously appreciated and its atmosphere always joyful.

We pray for the center to continue growing and improving and hope that participants continue to help us in this endeavor.





## The art of Japanese woodworking in Auroville

by Larry Seidlitz

I first met Laurent Wysocka at the dining hall in the Ashram, and he mentioned that since June he has been working as an apprentice of Kenji Matsumoto at a Japanese woodworking shop in Auroville. He had come from France with his wife and two daughters. His wife also works in Auroville, and his children go to school at the Lycée Français in Pondicherry. I scheduled an interview and we discussed his work in some depth. He also pointed me to Kenji's website which has additional helpful information and photos of some of the beautiful furniture and other items they have made: [www.japanesearthfurniture.com](http://www.japanesearthfurniture.com).

Kenji came to Auroville from Japan in 2001 and started the workshop. In Japan, he had worked under several different masters from whom he learned different aspects of his craft. As explained on his website: "Yonamine sensei taught me how to pick and read the wood; Oyadomari sensei demanded exacting standards and precision work where the error margin had to fall within 1/1000 of the dimensions; From Yuikikaku sensei I learnt how to measure, plan, and make accurate sketches and then execute the designs; and finally Shiroma sensei taught me how to reveal the hidden beauty of the wood and enhance its unique individuality." Kenji especially enjoys making tables, but he also makes "cupboards, cabinets, bedside tables, sofas, room dividers, decorative boxes, 'mouse-pads', and also more free-form sculptural pieces that can be displayed on the wall."

Laurent explained that the ideal in this type of woodworking is expressed by the term *shokunin*, which is the title given to those who are accomplished carpenters in this tradition. To achieve that, one's work must be perfect and also it must be fast. Along with workmanship, a *shokunin* has certain social responsibilities, and there is also a spiritual component.

The first teaching is that each piece of wood is very important; it is considered sacred. The carpenter is responsible for each piece of wood when cutting or shaping it so that it is not damaged. The worst thing is to throw away a piece of wood because of a mistake. In this work, each gesture, each action one takes on the wood is definitive. The wood, as the body, and as the earth itself, has a powerful memory, much more powerful than the mind. So if you make a mistake it shows on the wood, and it is difficult and often impossible to remove or correct it. If you make just the right gesture, the perfect stroke, it saves a lot of time. To correct mistakes, when it is possible, is difficult and time consuming.

So one must work with full concentration. Nothing else should exist for the woodworker but what is being done at that moment. Laurent uses the analogy of a bow and arrow. When the arrow is pulled back there is a tension put on the string. When working, one is in a similar state of tension. It is not agitation, but



Laurent Wysocka at Kenji's Woodwork Shop in Auroville. (Photo courtesy Laurent Wysocka).

a sustained concentration, one cannot become too relaxed. And one must maintain that state of concentration throughout the day. Before he started working at Kenji's shop, sometimes Laurent would listen to music while he did woodworking, but no longer. He explained that there they usually work in silence. They speak together for 10 or 15 minutes at the start of work in the morning, but after that they are quiet and concentrated. Laurent

explained that Kenji also teaches through silence. He said it is more a matter of observing Kenji and how he works, the consciousness and care that he brings to the work, his state of being; there is little verbal instruction. Also, he explained that Kenji silently observes him and how he works, his unique style, his strengths and weaknesses, and Kenji works with those characteristics by the types of work he gives to him.

Another thing that Kenji has stressed to Laurent is that one must let the body do the work, and not to think too much. One should not forget the mind, but the alignment between the mind and the body must be adjusted so there is a spontaneous, direct connection. For example, Laurent explained that when sharpening the tools, there is a very precise angle that must be achieved, and this must be exact all across the width of the tool. One can't mentally find this perfect angle, one must let the body find it. So one has to learn to trust the body to find the exact gesture that is needed when sharpening tools, and the same principle applies for working on the wood. He added that in this work there is a certain tension introduced because there is a dimension of fear; there is some danger that is involved. The tools are very sharp, and a slight mistake can result in injury. But one must allow the body to find the exact gesture and not allow thoughts or fear to come between the worker and the work.

Laurent explained that the Japanese method contrasts with the Western approach in that when they cut or plane a piece of wood, they pull the tool toward themselves, rather than pushing away as is done in the West. In the West, when you use a handsaw, the cutting is done with the stroke made away from the body. It is the same with a hand planer. If you have ever used a Western handsaw, you may have noticed how the metal blade tends to bend as you push, whereas when you pull it back towards you, this bending does not occur. Therefore, there is more control and precision when the cutting is done while pulling the tool. Laurent explained that this difference in tools may reflect the cultural difference between the Eastern tendency

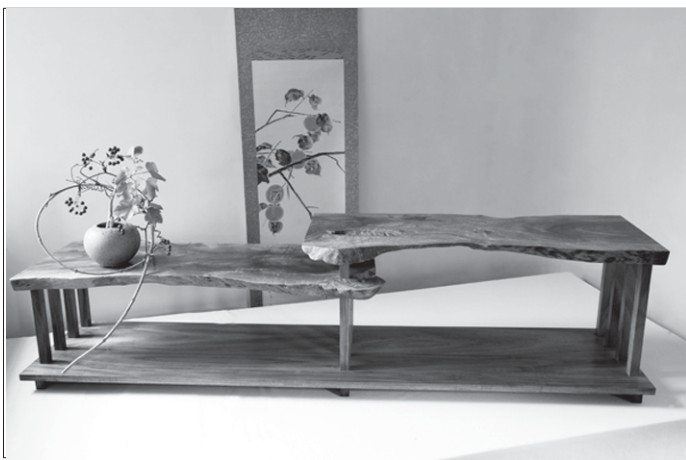


Zen style low table. (Photo by Sebastian Cortes)

to gather things within themselves, versus the Western tendency act outwardly upon the world.

Laurent explained that they use both hand tools and power tools. Power tools in the shop include a circular saw, a radial saw, an electric mortise for making the square holes for joints, and a sanding machine. Generally all the final finishing work is done by hand tools. There are different saws for different stages of the work, rougher saws for initial work, and finer saws for details. They also use an assortment of different planers and chisels. A *kanna* is a special kind of planer that is pulled to pare or finish wood, and there are various types depending on the stage of finishing and the type of finish desired. A *sumitsubo* is a tool for making straight lines on wood which contains a retractable-extendable thread in a wooden ink chamber, which is fixed in position on the wood with a special needle, and then snapped to make a straight line. It makes extremely straight lines. A simple square is used frequently for checking 90 degree angles and the evenness of the edges of a cut piece of wood.

The Japanese aesthetic is one of harmonious simplicity. As explained on Kenji's website, "Traditionally the Japanese people recognize and appreciate beauty in very ordinary and simple objects, a concept termed as Wabi-sabi. It can be roughly translated as 'simple quietude' (*wabi*), and 'elegant simplicity' (*sabi*). It is an aesthetic that is centered on the acceptance of transience, and acknowledging three simple realities that nothing lasts, nothing is



Natural edge low book shelf. (Photo by Sebastian Cortes)

finished, and nothing is perfect. Wabi-sabi has been elaborated as a sense of serene melancholy and a spiritual longing that an object induces in the viewer." Laurent explained that lines are often straight, which may sometimes be combined with relatively flat curves. A difference between the Chinese and Japanese aesthetic is that in Japan the curves tend to be closer to straight, more subtle, so that there is "just a feeling of curve." And straight lines are very straight, and are often accentuated by such features as parallel lines, or thin straight depressions along the line carved with a special tool. There is often a play of tension or contrast between the curves and straight lines.

Another striking aesthetic quality seen in much of the work from the shop is its retention of natural shapes and contours of the wood. For example, table tops may be made from a slice of a tree trunk, retaining the irregular shape and edge of the tree.



Natural edge low dining table. (Photo by Sebastian Cortes)

Knots, gaps, depressions, and other irregularities in the wood may be kept as part of the aesthetic. In some cases, even thick roots may be incorporated into the design. Sometimes other materials may be used, such as adhering gold foil into the natural depressions of the wood, or introducing natural or polished stones into the designs. Such irregularities often are accentuated by (and accentuate) simple straight lines in other parts of the piece.

The aesthetic also depends on the type of furniture. Whereas table-tops often have irregular natural shapes, chairs more often have simple, elegant straight or slightly curved lines. Doors and wood screens tend to have simple straight lines. Laurent explains that there is also an important balance between functionality and design. In constructing a piece, functionality is the first step, and is first assured in the strength of the wood pieces and their joints; then on this strong basis the aesthetic qualities are progressively honed and refined. Viewing the furniture, doors, screens, and other items shown on Kenji's website, it is clear that this careful craftsmanship truly reflects the beauty of the Japanese soul, and is a perfect example of the karma yoga advocated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.



# Chronicles

## Sri Aurobindo

by Kailas Jhaveri

This talk was first presented at the Open Centre in New York City in 1995. Subsequently it was published in Kailas's book *I am with you, part II and III* in 2007 by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

**T**hank you for inviting me to speak on the subject most dear to me: Sri Aurobindo. But you know the subject is too vast and I feel like a grain of sand trying to hold Infinity. To adapt the *Kathopanishadic sloka*, mind and speech return baffled and silent from any attempt to capture the magnitude and depth of His many-sided personality and work. Besides, His life was "not lived on the surface for men to see."

In the words of the Mother, the spiritual collaborator in His work: "What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme."

As we briefly review His life and work, we shall see how true this is from the very day of His birth. He was born at 5:00 a.m. before the sunrise, known as the *Brahma-muhurta* in India, the most auspicious hour when the gods awake to herald and worship the dawn—the Dawn of the New Creation. It was also the day of *Janmash-tami*, the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna. His father's name was Krishnadhan, meaning one who possesses Krishna as his wealth. And this was not mere co-incident, but rather significant as we shall see later in the review of his life.

The name chosen for him, Aurobindo, is equally significant. It means the pink lotus, the sacred national flower of India. It symbolises the *Avatara*, the descent of the Supreme upon earth in a human body. Providence had chosen Him to be the most powerful synthesis of the cultures of the



Kailas in 1970 (Photo courtesy Kailas)

East and the West.

Sri Aurobindo's father was a civil surgeon with a degree from England. He desired his children to have a western education too. As a young child Sri Aurobindo was looked after by an English governess and hardly knew his own mother tongue. At the tender age of five he was sent away to the Loretto Convent School in Darjeeling and at seven, he was taken to England along with his two brothers for academic studies. He was to learn to be detached and self-reliant. He was first entrusted to the English family of His father's friend, Mr. Drewett, in Manchester.

He received a good grounding in Greek and Latin at St. Paul's for which he earned many prizes. He also learned many European languages and achieved mastery of their literature and history. A brilliant student, he secured a scholarship at King's College, Cambridge and passed the first part of the classical Tripos with distinction. At the same time, he was registered as a candidate for the Indian Civil Service and won a stipend for it from which he supported his two brothers too. These were trying times during which he did not have enough money even for food and winter clothing. This proves not only his courage, perseverance, industry and character, but also his mastery over himself and a state of equality in all circumstances—a

good foundation for Yoga!

Although his father could not send enough money due to his own generous attitude towards the needy who came to him for help, he did send him cuttings from Indian newspapers, depicting atrocities, inhuman treatment and exploitation by the British government. On reading these reports, Sri Aurobindo felt that he would play a role in the struggle for the freedom of India from British domination as well as in the resurgence of his motherland. Obviously, he felt no calling for the Indian Civil Service under the British. So, though he passed all the other tests, he did not appear for the final riding test and thus was disqualified for the Service. Now, he looked forward to his return to India.

After getting an appointment in the service of the Maharaja of Baroda, he sailed for India in 1893 at the tender age of twenty-one. Mother India received her son warmly by granting him the boon of a major spiritual experience: an absolute calm descended upon him as soon as he touched her shore and this remained with him ever after.

Besides his work with the Maharaja, who consulted him on various matters, he was a lecturer in French at Baroda College of which he later became the Principal. During this time he mastered many Indian languages, including Sanskrit so as to gain first-hand knowledge of Indian culture and its spiritual basis. He also translated several plays from Sanskrit into English and wrote several plays and poems in English too.

He married the most beautiful Bengali girl Mrinalini who was completely devoted to him. Sri Aurobindo's intense love for India whom he worshipped as an aspect of the Divine Mother, called him to her service. He had no time for his personal life. He left his comfortable, well-paid job and accepted a life of austerity and constant risk to work for the freedom of India. As he said in one of his poems, Invitation:

*Stark must he be and a kinsman to  
danger  
Who shares my kingdom and walks  
at my side.*





He edited two national journals, *Bande Mataram* and *Karmayogin*, addressed meetings, giving an entirely new direction to the political movement, demanding independence without any compromise as our birthright instead of begging for it. The force and conviction of his fiery articles and speeches implanted in the minds of his countrymen an indomitable will for absolute freedom. This shook even the mighty British Empire and he was marked out as a most dangerous man.

Sri Aurobindo was an agnostic until he met a sanyasin, who cured his brother Barin of a severe fever by giving him a glass of water charged with the power of a mantra. This convinced him of the power of spirituality which he wanted to use for freeing India. He then met a yogi called Lele who taught him how to silence his mind, which he achieved in only three days. After this he began to receive the inner guidance. From that day he was on his own.

The British government implicated him in the famous Alipore Bomb case and arrested him. He was in jail without a trial for one year. One is shocked to read about the inhuman conditions of the prison life, but Sri Aurobindo was concentrated on his spiritual search. It was as if Sri Krishna had put in his hands the *Bhagavadgita* which now he had time to read. Sri Krishna himself not only revealed its true message but gave Sri Aurobindo another major spiritual experience of the presence of Vasudeva—the Lord of the Universe—in everything, in everyone, everywhere, guiding and directing all, including himself.

When the trial for his case was going on in the court, Sri Aurobindo was writing instructions for his counselor. However, unexpectedly, another counselor, Chittaranjan Das, was placed to defend Him. And Sri Aurobindo received this message from within: “This is the man who will save you from the snares put around your feet. Put aside those papers. It is not you who will instruct him. I will instruct him.”

And at the end of the trial, Chittaranjan Das concluded his defense with these words revealing his most prophetic insight:

*Long after he is dead and gone,  
his words will be echoed and re-  
echoed not only in India, but  
across distant seas and lands.*

Finally, He was acquitted because the government could not find any evidence to prove His involvement.

All the major spiritual experiences came to Him unsought. He had no personal need or ambition. He lived for God alone. He had no guru or master save the Divine within. He was an acknowledged national leader and continued to edit the journals and address mass meetings until He received the inner guidance to leave the political field since he was chosen for another work for India and the world. He received a clear inner command to leave British India and go to Chandernagore and then to Pondicherry, both under French rule.

He arrived in Pondicherry on 4 April 1910. It is interesting to note that according to the archeological survey done by a French professor, Pondicherry was well known in antiquity as *Vedapuriswara*, a seat of Vedic learning, where Lord Shiva was worshipped. And it is believed that the sage Agastya taught the Vedas at the place where Sri Aurobindo Ashram stands. No wonder it was from this place that Sri Aurobindo recovered the true meaning of the Veda and gave us *The Secret of the Veda*, a book expounding its true message which had been lost.

Sri Aurobindo's life in Pondicherry was not easy. A few disciples had followed him and financially they were always in dire need. Besides, they were constantly pursued by the British police though they had left the political field and had come for a quiet spiritual purpose.

He never wanted the Yoga or its power for himself. He had the experience of Nirvana, but he did not consider it to be the highest achievement, because for him life had a purpose which was to manifest the Divine. He had to explore therefore all the planes of consciousness: from Matter, Life and Mind to a higher consciousness above the Mind and beyond. For, he could not be satisfied with anything short of the Divine Manifestation. As he said: “Man is

God, hiding himself from Nature,” and “Earth is a cradle for the arriving God.” This is a constant refrain of the magnificent song of His life. Here is an example from one of his earliest plays, *Perseus the Deliverer*:

*Cassiopea:*

*How can the immortal gods and  
Nature change?*

*Perseus:*

*All alters in a world that is the same.  
Man most must change who is a soul  
of Time;  
His gods too change and live in  
larger light.*

*Cepheus:*

*Then man too may arise to greater  
heights,*

*His being draw nearer to the gods?*

*Perseus:*

*Perhaps*

*But the blind nether forces still have  
power*

*And the ascent is slow and long is  
Time.*

*Yet shall Truth grow and harmony  
increase:*

*The day shall come when men feel  
close and one.'*

This was the difficulty: the nether forces of Inconscient Matter, the nescient substance of the physical body in which the Divine Inhabitant dwells.

He considered His own Yoga as an indispensable means for the realisation of God in man. For, he knew the problems of human life on earth, a life of ignorance with its roots still in the inconscient Matter, a life besieged by turbulent vital desires, passions and ambitions, and a mind, however rational, enlightened and spiritualised, still imperfect and limited in its power to offer any lasting solution. He had come to bring man out of his struggle with ignorance, falsehood, pain, suffering and death not by an escape into some other-worldly heaven or an entry into Nirvana. He had come to hew a perfect path to help man transcend himself and his egocentric consciousness so that he may become what he secretly is: God. But he knew that this



can only be done by the effective and transforming power of a higher consciousness, not yet manifest, which He later called the Supramental Truth-consciousness.

He said in one of His letters:

*I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace and Bliss into the earth-consciousness. I see it ever leaning down on my consciousness. I believe the descent of this Truth, opening the way to a development of the Divine Consciousness here, to be the final sense of the earth evolution.*

We, in India, believe that for each new momentous step of evolution of consciousness an aspect of the Divine descends in a human body upon earth to open a way for humanity to ascend to a higher plane of consciousness. Our mythology speaks of a series of avatars, helping the evolution in Nature from Matter to Man and the possibility of a further evolution when Truth shall be established on earth in its integrality.

The definition of the avatara as given by Sri Aurobindo fits him perfectly, though he never claimed himself to be an avatara. He says: "The avatara is always a dual phenomenon of divinity and humanity; the Divine takes upon himself the human nature with all its outer limitations and makes them the circumstances, the means and instruments of the Divine Consciousness and Divine Power—a vessel of the Divine Birth and the Divine Works."

For us, Sri Aurobindo is an emanation of the Supreme. He came upon earth to assure us of the inevitable descent of the Supramental Consciousness to create a new race, a gnostic race and a new world of

Truth-Consciousness, a world in which ignorance, falsehood, error, suffering and death have no place.

On the other side of the globe, another being had been prepared to share in His work. She came from France with her husband Paul Richard, who had met Sri Aurobindo earlier and had declared him to be 'the greatest among the great divine men of Asia.' She, Mirra, whom we came to know and adore as the Mother, carried in Her inmost depths the ideal of progressive universal harmony. She hoped to realise the kingdom of God on earth, by awakening in all the inner divinity which is one and by working for its manifestation.

On meeting Sri Aurobindo on 29 March 1914, She recognised Him at once as the being who had guided Her in Her

*He did not think like an ordinary man. He had achieved a complete silence of the mind and the stillness of the being for the highest light to pass through without any distortion. He saw with an inner eye of Truth, penetrating everything.*

dreams and visions. She felt in His presence a great peace enveloping and descending to penetrate Her very soul. The next day, She wrote in Her diary:

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

Sri Aurobindo said about the Mother later: "It is the first time I knew that perfect surrender to the last physical cell was humanly possible."

This surrender to the Divine is one of the most essential conditions of the Integral Yoga. It was a silent but momentous meeting of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo,

while Paul Richard and Sri Aurobindo conversed on serious subjects. What took place on an inner plane between the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is significantly revealed by her later (in the third person):

*In silence, they exchanged the depths of their souls and thoughts; in silence, they spoke of the greatness of the work to be done and the splendour of the victory to come, of which the dazzling radiance about him seemed a glorious pledge.*

The practical outcome of Their meeting in its early stages was, for our priceless benefit, the launching of the philosophical journal *Arya*, the first issue of which came

out in 1914 on 15 August, the birthday of Sri Aurobindo. And though the Mother and Paul Richard left after six months for France, when the First World War broke out, Sri

Aurobindo shouldered the responsibility alone and continued writing about 60 pages of the *Arya* every month on diverse subjects without interruption for six years. Thus all His major works were published serially except the epic poem *Savitri*. It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo wrote six or seven books on different subjects simultaneously and he worked on them all in the last week of every month before publication.

This is to say that He did not live like an ordinary man. He was indifferent to food, sleep and comfort. For, He was equal in all circumstances. He did not think like an ordinary man. He had achieved a complete silence of the mind and the stillness of the being for the highest light to pass through without any distortion. He saw with an inner eye of Truth, penetrating everything. Not only the truth of things, events and people, but the truth of the occult worlds and their actions too were re-



vealed to Him. Speech and action emanated from Him with the clarity of the vision of the whole. He said once that he could write the entire *Arya* every month for 70 years and yet the knowledge that came to him from above would hardly be exhausted.

He clearly states His goal in *The Life Divine*:

*To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness; to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination; to build peace and self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering; to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities; to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation, —this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution. (pp. 1-2)*

In one of His letters in April 1920, He wrote: “The inner Guide, the universal Teacher, showed me my path entirely . . . Without reaching the Supramental, it is impossible to know the ultimate secret of the world . . . But its attainment is not easy. After 15 years I am just now rising to the lowest of the three layers of the supermind and trying to draw up all my movements into it.”

The Mother finally returned to Pondicherry on 24 April 1920. She said that India was Her true country, the country of Her soul, and Her work was to give a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the divine manifestation upon earth. Sri Aurobindo was densely occupied with the spiritual work and often spoke of the possibility of the descent of the higher consciousness and its process. People around Him felt the power of His consciousness in curing numerous diseases, in solving the problems of those who sought His help

and in influencing world events.

He spent considerable time reading the letters of the disciples and helping them, often working till the early hours of the morning. He had an excellent sense of humor, packed with wisdom. One has only to read His *Thoughts and Aphorisms* or *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran and some of His poems. For example:

*The mediaeval ascetics hated women and thought that they were created by God for the temptation of monks. One may be allowed to think more nobly both of God and woman.*

*A God who cannot smile could not have created this humorous universe.*

All this in spite of his own inner engagement in breaking the tremendous resistance of Inconscient Matter—a formidable work of opening up not only the most recalcitrant physical consciousness but the very cells of his body to the light of the Truth-Consciousness.

24 November 1926 marked the day of victory for him when the force of Krishna’s Overmind Consciousness descended into the physical. Krishna is the Lord of Bliss, supporting the evolution of Nature and leading it to the absolute self-existent Bliss. The descent of this force was essential for preparing the descent of the Supramental Consciousness. Many felt a flood of light rushing down from above. The atmosphere was charged with electric energy. In silence the disciples received the blessings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Now, the descent of this Overmind Consciousness brought with it most spectacular events. One day, the Mother received what is known as the Word of Creation, with its inherent power of realisation. A brilliant creation was worked out in extraordinary details with marvelous experiences and contacts with divine beings. When She spoke about it to Sri Aurobindo, he was silent for a while. Then He said: “Yes, this is an Overmind creation. It is

very interesting, very well done. You will perform miracles which will make you famous throughout the world . . .” Then, He smiled and said: “It will be a great success. But it is an Overmind creation. And it is not success that we want; we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality.”

The Mother went back to Her room, concentrated intensely and in a few hours She completely dissolved the creation that was on the verge of manifesting. This is typical of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, pure, immaculate, transparent and one-pointed instruments of the Divine, who never compromised. To know what the Overmind Consciousness is, one has to read *The Life Divine*, where He gives a detailed description of the intervening planes of Consciousness between Mind and Supermind.

For a divine life on earth an integral transformation of all the parts of our being, including the nescient substance of our physical being, which is molded out of inconscient Matter, is a prerequisite so that the impurities and obscurities of the lower nature do not invade or swallow up the light of the Truth-Consciousness when it descends from above.

Sri Aurobindo asserts that even the highest plane of the Overmind cannot wholly transform the Inconscient. He needed therefore to bring down the light and force of the Supramental Truth-Consciousness into the very cells of His physical body and into the earth-consciousness. He withdrew therefore from all external contacts in order to fully concentrate on this work and gave the complete charge of the Ashram to the Mother in 1926.

He was absolutely certain that the evolution of Nature which marched from Matter to Life and then to the rudimentary mind in the animal, reaching to the present stage of mental development in man, could not cease at so imperfect a creation as man. It must continue in its ascending series of evolution till the supreme Truth-Consciousness with its omniscient knowledge, unerring will, invincible power and





invariable self-existent bliss is manifest. And this He knew could only be done by the descent of the effective and transforming power of the Supramental Consciousness. He saw it as a thing decreed and inevitable in the course of the terrestrial evolution of Nature.

It was indeed a veritable labour of God, but He had received an inner command, as described in His poem, 'A God's Labour:' (*Collected Poems*, pp. 99-102)

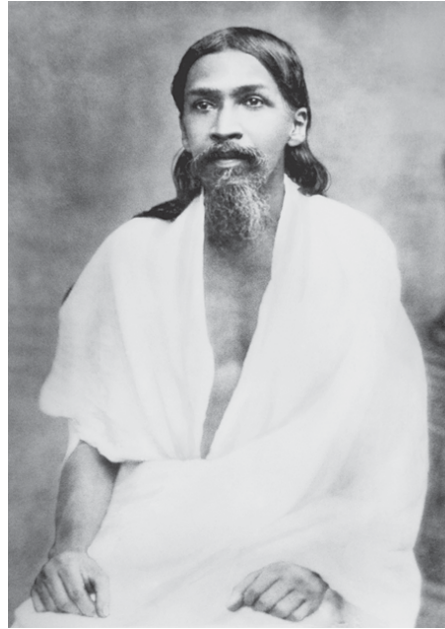
*I have been digging deep and long  
Mid a horror of filth and mire  
A bed for the golden river's song,  
A home for the deathless fire . . .  
A voice cried, 'Go where none have  
gone!  
Dig deeper, deeper yet  
Till thou reach the grim foundation  
stone  
And knock at the keyless gate.*

It was a severe and painful work to penetrate the hard rock of the Inconscient where none had gone. But He was aiming at the irresistible victory of God by building a rainbow bridge between the Earth's gulfs and Heaven's heights.

The Ashram grew spontaneously around the Mother with a different aim than ordinarily conceived, its aim being the total transformation of the being and nature. The pressure of Her presence for organisation, order, cleanliness, beauty, harmony and perfection, by being conscious of one's thoughts, feelings and actions was very strong, because nothing escaped Her attention. However, Her understanding of human nature was deep and profound; She was kind, compassionate and patient; Her love was so boundless that the whole world could take refuge in Her.

In 1938, Sri Aurobindo saw the Asuric power behind Hitler and foresaw a consequent crisis for human civilisation. War was not desirable at that time, because

England and France were not yet ready. The Spitfire was not yet built on a large scale. America was pursuing a policy of non-involvement; Russia was ready to join with Germany. So, Sri Aurobindo was



*Sri Aurobindo circa 1915-1918. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)*

engaged in pushing back the headlong rush of the Asuric forces so as to delay the war. He saved the world but had to pay the price and bear the blow Himself. He tripped and fell, fracturing His right thigh bone. He remained lying quietly without a cry for help or even a word. The Mother must have received the vibration in Her consciousness and came to His room. She called for the doctor and the injured leg was put in a cast. Sri Aurobindo was shifted to His bed and a team of attendants was fixed by the Mother. The attendants now had the opportunity to draw Him into conversation for His insight on current topics of interest.

During the Second World War, He followed the news closely. He had a unique political insight and favored India's participation with the Allies. It was difficult for the people to understand how Sri Aurobindo, who had fought against the British rule, could now support the Allies. But Sri Aurobindo explained His position by declaring: "It is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself in the life of humanity against the darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth. It is the forces at work behind the battle that have to be seen. I support the British for India's

own interest and for humanity." He had written:

*Great Titan beings and demoniac  
powers,  
World-egos rapt with lust and  
thought and will,  
Vast minds and lives without a spirit  
within:  
Impatient architects of error's house,  
Leaders of the cosmic ignorance  
and unrest  
And sponsors of sorrow and  
mortality  
Embodied the dark Ideas of the  
Abys. (*Savitri*, p. 220)*

When Hitler was rushing like a mad bull all over Europe, people did not think that the world had any chance to resist his onslaught. Sri Aurobindo simply said: "Hitler is not immortal." He had put all His spiritual force behind the Allies and had no doubt about the issue of the war. In His own poem on Hitler, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

*Thus driven he must stride on  
conquering all,  
Threatening and clamouring,  
brutal, invincible.  
Perhaps to meet upon his storm-  
swept road  
A greater devil—or thunderstroke of  
God. (*Collected Poems*, p. 111)*

He had also written: "Besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness . . . greater than any other and more effective." So, He explained to His disciples: "if we can stand up to him (Hitler), all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad sunlit uplands, but if we fail, then the whole world will sink into the abyss of a new dark age."

Hitler had announced that he would declare his victory over England from the Buckingham Palace on the 15<sup>th</sup> August.



Sri Aurobindo had put his force with the Allies and was sure of the outcome, 15 August being his birthday. Well, Germany had to accept defeat and withdraw.

Sri Aurobindo said: 'The next conflict will be between Germany and Russia.' This did happen in spite of the expectations to the contrary. Then, non-involved America too decided to join the Allies in defense of civilisation and its highest attained values after Japan attacked Pearl Harbour.

When Calcutta was bombed and the Japanese were gleefully advancing into Assam, Sri Aurobindo intervened. The Japanese warships were exploded and sunk. They had also to take a sound beating from an unexpected heavy downpour, inundating the dense jungles of Assam. The jubilant marching Japanese army, bogged down by flood and mud, was compelled to retreat. For us it was Sri Aurobindo's war, turning the wheels of destiny in favor of the future of humanity.

During the war many of the disciples of Sri Aurobindo brought their families to the Ashram, considering it to be a safe shelter. But the children could not be expected to do the Yoga. Some arrangement had to be made for their education. This was the beginning under the Mother's direct guidance of what came to be known later as Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

It was during this time that Sri Aurobindo's revised edition of *The Life Divine* was published, and He resumed His work on *Savitri*. He took great pains to raise it to His ideal of a perfect perfection, revising it again and again in the light of His spiritual experiences and the inspiration He received. The work suffered at times because of the heavy load of correspondence with His disciples. The book of Death and the Epilogue had not yet been revised.

*Savitri* is an expression of something seen, felt or experienced by Sri Aurobindo. It is mystic poetry, but not abstract. A new kind of poetry demands a new mentality in the reader. It is magnificent poetry, elevating us to a realm of sheer beauty and delight. The story of *Savitri* is taken from a legend in the Mahabharata. But Sri Aurobindo has turned this legend into a power-

ful symbol of his own spiritual experiences, thus giving it the most profound significance. It consists of twelve Books and spans over 23,803 lines.

*Savitri*, the heroine of the epic, is an emanation of the Divine Mother who has come upon earth in answer to the call of humanity to save it from Ignorance, Falsehood and Death and lead it towards the light of Truth and immortal Bliss. The epic is an adventure of consciousness in which Sri Aurobindo guides us in our upward journey through the different characters, revealing mysteries after mysteries of the different worlds and their planes of consciousness from Inconscient Matter to the Superconscient heights. He gives us a comprehensive understanding of the forces active in the individual and on the universal and the transcendental levels of existence. He lays bare the Divine Plan in all its details and the purpose of Existence with an incisive insight into the psychology of man and the interaction of the subtle forces. At the same time, He gives us guidelines to meet the challenge of these forces active in the world.

*Savitri* lifts us out of the mundane and the ordinary rut of life and makes life the chosen field for the Divine to manifest by overcoming all the obstacles on the path and winning the victory for the Divine. It is the journey of the soul ascending to the highest under the impetus of an intense spiritual aspiration. It illumines us with its power and knowledge of the Truth at each stage of our ascension. It is the story of man's evolution of consciousness with its joy of the spiritual adventure.

*Savitri* is such a perfect guide on the sunlit path of the Integral Yoga that we feel no fear of faltering, or hesitation in following its guidance. We are able to walk securely with certainty and featherlike feet, our heart singing a song of life, our mind fully awakened to the beauty and splendor of existence and our whole being dancing its way in ecstasy towards the goal of the divine manifestation.

World upon world is revealed by the poet of the Supreme. In the language of the Rig Veda, as a seer working out the occult truths and their discoveries of Knowledge,

Sri Aurobindo brought into being "the seven craftsmen of heaven, and in the light of the Day they spoke and wrought the things of their Wisdom."

The last writings of Sri Aurobindo appeared under the title *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, where He spoke of a race of beings, possessing a Mind of Light and capable of living in the Truth. This may be called the beginning of the Supramental Realisation.

As in life, so in death, every action of the Gnostic being is self-determined. Reading the account of Sri Aurobindo's passing, we come to know that a grim battle was fought in the physical sphere for a set purpose. The purpose was to bring down the Supramental light into the physical body in order to transform and divinise Matter. This had to be done to build a bridge between the abyss and the heights for the Supramental Transformation.

K.D. Sethna, one of the close disciples of Sri Aurobindo—also known as Amal Kiran, meaning 'A Clear Ray,' the name given to him by Sri Aurobindo—reports this about the event: "In the course of this plunge, as layer after layer of the occult Inconscient is torn open and the Supramental light sought to be called down into it, various dreadful possibilities rise up, and great inner wounds as well as severe bodily tensions have to be endured. Immense are his trials in spite of the sublimest light within His body."

According to the medical reports, Sri Aurobindo was in a deep uraemic coma, a state which does not admit of any return to consciousness. But Sri Aurobindo opened His eyes at frequent intervals and asked for a drink of water or enquired what the time was. It was a conscious yogic withdrawal. Death was not a mystery to Him. He had plumbed the abyss and scaled the heights. He was the author of His own cosmic drama. He could have cured Himself by His own spiritual force, but He refused to. When a disciple, who had seen Him cure many individuals of incurable diseases, asked Him why He was not using the same force for Himself, He simply said: "Can't explain. You won't understand."

On December 4th, He expressed His



wish to sit up and He sat in His chair normally. After an hour, He came back to His bed and the symptoms returned. He was conscious till the last moment. For, half an hour before leaving His body, He drank some water and bestowed on all around the last glance of recognition and compassion. He left His body at 1:25 a.m. on the 5th December, 1950.

Sri Aurobindo had said once before: "The Divinity acts according to the consciousness above and the Lila (the play) below cording to the need of the Lila." In another letter He had said: "why should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all His operations? What if a failure suits Him better and serves better the ultimate purpose?" This may offer a clue as to why He left His body and did not use His spiritual force to cure Himself.

Sri Aurobindo's body was suffused with the golden light of the Supramental Consciousness. The Mother announced: "Sri Aurobindo's body is charged with such a concentration of Supramental Light that there is no sign of decomposition."

This light remained, and was seen by many who paid their last homage, until the 9th December when the Mother decided to put the body in a silver-lined rosewood casket, and it was interred at 1:00 p.m. in the centre of the Ashram main building under the *Service* tree. The Mother gave the following prayer which is inscribed on the Samadhi in both English and French:

*To Thee who hast been the  
material envelope of our Master,  
to Thee our infinite gratitude.  
Before Thee who hast done so  
much for us, who hast worked,  
struggled, suffered, hoped,  
endured so much, before Thee  
who hast willed all, attempted all,  
prepared, achieved all for us,  
before Thee we bow down and  
implore that we may never forget,  
even for a moment, all that we  
owe to Thee.*

He had clearly said that He needed nothing for Himself. He had come to hew the path of the Supramental Realisation

and to pay God's debt to earth and men. Only the Divine can bear the burden that He had to bear and all who come to help humanity have to bear. He fought with the dark powers of the Inconscient and had no hesitation in giving up His body as a supreme sacrifice to win the Divine's victory.

And this victory was achieved on the universal scale on 29 February 1956, when the Supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow. People who are inwardly ready, who are in contact with the higher forces and who are open to them can still feel the action of this consciousness in the earth atmosphere and in the world events. Everywhere we mark the pressure of this Force towards change and reconstitution. All our fixed laws of living, whether social, political, ethical, religious or other, seem to be collapsing. One is compelled to discover the inner laws of the Truth and to learn to live with the vision of a complex unity where diversities complement rather than conflict with each other.

There are people everywhere who have accepted to face heroically the furnace of inner purification and transformation of the being. It is interesting to note that it was in the year of the third anniversary of the Supramental Descent, in 1968, that the Mother invited all men of goodwill and sincerity to build the international township of Auroville for the realisation of a progressive universal harmony.

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo were equal in consciousness and complementarity to each other. She too was for us an emanation of The Divine Mother in Her aspects of Wisdom, Power, Love, Beauty, Harmony and Perfection, leading us all to the perfection of a divine manifestation on earth.

The Mother assured the disciples that Sri Aurobindo had not left the earth atmosphere. He is still there in the subtle physical, conscious and alive, ready to help. So is the Mother who left Her body 23 years later on 17 November 1973.

I would like to end this talk by summing up the message of Their life and work for humanity through these lines of *Savitri*:

*There are greater destinies mind  
cannot surmise,  
Fixed on the summit of the evolving  
Path  
The Traveller now treads in the  
Ignorance,  
Unaware of his next step, not  
knowing his goal.  
Mind is not all his tireless climb can  
reach,  
There is a fire on the apex of the  
worlds,  
There is a house of the Eternal Light,  
There is an infinite truth, an  
absolute power. (p. 704)*

*A Light there is that leads, a Power  
that aids . . . (p. 339)*

*Out of the Immortal's substance you  
are made;  
Your actions can be swift revealing  
steps,  
Your life a changeful mould for  
growing gods.  
A Seer, a strong Creator, is within,  
The immaculate Grandeur broods  
upon your days,  
Almighty powers are shut in  
Nature's cells.  
A greater destiny waits you in your  
front:  
This transient earthly being if he  
wills  
Can fit his acts to a transcendent's  
scheme.  
He who now stares at the world with  
ignorant eyes  
Hardly from the Inconscient's night  
aroused,  
That look at images and not at Truth  
Can fill those orbs with an immortal's  
sight . . .  
Authors of earth's high change, to  
you it is given  
To cross the dangerous spaces of the  
soul  
And touch the mighty Mother stark  
awake  
And meet the Omnipotent in this  
house of flesh  
And make of life the million-bodied  
One. (p. 370)*





## Mother's way with flowers

by Richard Pearson

Based on a talk given in Auroville in December 2006

I will start with the flower that was given to me as I entered the room, which is symbolic of the garden of life, the fifth of the Matrimandir gardens. It is a happy 'double red hibiscus.' I call it happy because it gives the vibrant feeling of life! The general name for all double red hibiscus flowers is Power of the Consciousness. This is how the Mother describes it: "All the powers of controlling and dominating the lower movements of inconscient Nature." That name gives us an idea that we are dealing with a particular vibration which goes beyond whatever we have known about up till now. Previously, people gave names to flowers often imagining how best to describe them. I believe that the Mother's names have made concrete what Sri Aurobindo experienced. For me, flowers named by the Mother are the materialisation of all the philosophy, all the teaching, and also all the realisation of Sri Aurobindo. We know that behind Matter there is something subtle, something occult. I feel that flowers are making concrete what is most difficult to materialise.

I would like to share with you the Mother's experiences with flowers and how she handled them when dealing with sadhaks. I won't go into the details, but I would like to take you back to the Mother's stay in Japan. She spent, I believe, more than four years in Japan, during which time she actually became like a Japanese person: she studied the language, dressed in the Japanese way and imbibed the essence of Buddhism. Now, there are several ceremonies, and recently I was reading about the tea ceremony where you have flowers floating on a dish, as I think is often done in Auroville. It is true that the flower by itself is something that is a gift from Nature and it is in Nature that we



Richard Pearson in his room in the Ashram. (Photo by Larry Seidlitz)

identify ourselves most easily with the Divine. It is a universal feeling bringing great peace and tremendous vastness carrying us beyond ourselves. Japan is a beautiful country; the people love beauty and go out of their way to visit a spot just because it is beautiful.

In her *Prayers and Meditations* we have several examples of the experiences she had with flowers. I feel that they are replete with inspiration that may help us to identify ourselves with the Divine through love, beauty and entire self-giving. Once when she met a Chinese vendor who was selling little roses, she felt that these roses were offering themselves. There was also the experience of the cherry tree in which through one flower she entered the tree itself. Through the tree she went down with the sap to its very centre, and there she felt a current of blue force rising up. And it was bursting forth in this magnificence of flowers. Thus, she identified herself with the consciousness of the tree, saying very simply, "What difference is there between the human body and the body of a tree? In truth, there is none." (April 1917) And as she came out of this experience, the tree whispered in her ear, "It is in the cherry blossom that lies the remedy for the disorders of the spring." Much later, when we were working on *Flowers and Their Messages*, we asked Mother about this particular sentence. She said that in Japan, like in some other countries, they have the

tradition of making teas from the cherry blossom to avoid boils and all impurities of the blood: the illnesses of spring time.

Another aspect of her way with flowers was her games with flowers at the Ashram in 1929-1930. Mother was very simple, very direct, very spontaneous and particularly very innovative. By that time, there were more than 100 flowers that Mother had named. Everyone did not know all the names, as it often happens even now. She would gather a few flowers in her hand and I imagine she would say, "Well, what do we have here? Can we make a sentence? Can we make something living out of all these names?" So then four or five elderly sadhaks would each try and make a little sentence. In Mother's studio I was fortunate to see the flowers painted and the hand-written sentences that were approved by the Mother. The sentences are very simple. For example, one sentence might be something like: "The five Psychological Perfections will lead you through Sincerity, Faith, Devotion, Aspiration and Surrender to your goal." Now, Psychological Perfection is the frangipani, the champak, as we call it in India. And this was a very important flower. In fact, along with Divine Solicitude and Victory it was the main flower given by the Mother to everybody in the days when I was a young boy.

I will now take you back to the war time period, when the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were working inwardly for the conquest over the forces which were trying to destroy the world and all our civilisation. When I came in 1946 there was a curious practice going on: children and adults would be busy picking up flowers. They would be collecting Service flowers in the Ashram courtyard and others from below the Transformation tree. 'Transformation' comes from the Indian Cork Tree; it is a fragrant white flower. These and other flowers would be taken to the Mother, and when giving the flowers to her you had to tell her how many flowers you had. So, for children it was a great game. You wanted to give a large number, so that the Mother would give you a broad smile! And all those figures were noted down by the



Mother. Later on she said: “I had long lists, like that!” [gesture]

Much later, when we were revising the *Flowers and Their Messages* book and we could ask her questions to be clear., one of the questions we asked was “Why did you count the flowers?” Why was that important? Her answer was very simple: “I wanted to put all the material wealth of Nature at the feet of Sri Aurobindo.” So the next question obviously was: “But why did you stop?” Her answer was again very simple: “I stopped when the work was finished.”

I will tell you a very amusing story in regards to this counting and how it is connected to one particular flower which grows in the Matrimandir area. The tree, called Karnikara, meaning ‘borne on Krishna’s ear,’ has large leaves, one side is beige color, the other side is chestnut, or light chocolate color when it falls. It has large white flowers which are very fragrant. You may find my description a little funny: to me, the sepals look like a banana skin when you peel it half-way. This flower had not been named by the Mother, but it was taken to her by Jyotin-da, an elderly dear friend of mine. He took it to the Mother and asked her, “What is this flower?” Mother said, “Oh, this is the Realisation of Accounts; now we don’t have to count flowers anymore!”

Now, here is the other aspect to the story. In the *Flower’s and Their Messages* book it does not appear with that name. What would you think it appears as? Can you guess? Realisation of Accounts is quite mundane; Mother would keep the accounts figures on long strips of paper. Remember what Mother was saying, “I want to put all this wealth, Nature’s wealth, at the feet of Sri Aurobindo.” Do you have an inkling? Well, ‘wealth’ is certainly there, ‘realisation’ is also there . . . but the key word was ‘supramental.’ Realisation of Supramental Wealth. Can you imagine! Can you imagine what that means? With the flower it has become easy. I’m just laughing because it is that which we are all here to express also in our own way.

This brings us to Nature’s offering of flowers. There is an aspect that is strictly personal: the relation of the Mother with

Mother Nature. This is clear when we read the earlier Prayers too, but she explains it in one of her much later talks. It was—and still is—I believe, the pact between her divine will for transformation and Nature’s answer. Things that go on, as she humorously remarks, “behind the scenes,” and that we, with our little minds, cannot understand or would misunderstand. You see, as in the story of counting the flowers, the numerical value represented the number of elements she was working on through the flower given to her by Nature: the ‘transformation’ or the ‘prayer’ or the ‘aspiration’ she was infusing into us, into the earth-consciousness. “Be careful of what you pray for! It will be granted,” she remarked with tongue in cheek. Very recently, when we had this very heavy rain, I felt so strongly that flowers fallen on the ground have an energy which surpasses what they have when they are on the tree. It is as though they have been put at our feet, so to say, given to us. We have only to bend down and pick them up. To me, this is Nature’s offering.

I would like you to know how important are the flowers here in Auroville—as well as elsewhere, but more so here where we are sort of more open to the influence of the flowers she has named—how they reveal all the work that has to be done. I was coming here by taxi and I was looking out and observing how it is interesting to note the season when each flower blooms. December is a bit cool, so everything starts coming out, but it’s also the rainy period, when things have had quite a lashing. I saw all along the road erect stalks like soldiers standing up with green, spiky balls having little orange flowers peeping out from each one of them. I must remind you that orange is the color of the New World, of the Supramental World. A long green stalk with little balls rising up one above the other—a big one, a little smaller, then still smaller—and tiny orange flowers, very velvety, were peeping out. When this flower was shown to the Mother, she called it Ascension. And then she quietly added the words, Ascension of the Consciousness, that is, of our awareness. That is the flower here for this season.

The Mother named some flowers from Auroville. For me the most significant one is the little flower we have lost. It was growing in the Matrimandir Nursery, and the common name is the Star of Bethlehem. There are quite a few flowers connected with Bethlehem, as you may know. It signifies purity, and it signifies also divinity. The Mother gave to this flower the name Beauty in Collective Simplicity. And that I found so very apt for what we are all trying for in Auroville. In the Ashram too we have the little sentence of the Mother, “There is a great beauty in simplicity.”

Finally, there is the amusing story of a blue flower which grows quite commonly in the wild. The Mother called it Miracle! Actually, to tell you the truth, we don’t have very many very blue flowers in our tropical climate. We have lots of yellows, oranges, and of course, white is all over, especially after the rains. She called it Miracle. But when this flower was brought by an Aurovilian to her, she said quite simply, “Oh, this is The Air of Auroville!” It’s a tiny blue flower that comes out after the rain in bunches, fragrant flowers clinging to the slim branches. In fact, it comes more often now than it used to come before. Maybe we have more rain. Maybe it’s Nature’s offering! One of the common names is ironwood, because they say that when there are forest fires, things get all burned down, but this doesn’t burn. It comes up again, and later on it is as strong as ever.

We have been treating this year 2006 as a very special one. It is 50 years after the descent of the supermind into the world. I feel that all around us in Nature, as well as within us and even in our relations with others or in our dealings with our so-called problems, that something else is acting. There is a change; something new is happening, something which was not there before.

*Flowers are extremely receptive. All the flowers to which I have given a significance receive exactly the force I put into them and transmit it. —The Mother*



## Essays

### Emotion and its transformation

by Larry Seidlitz

As with many things in Sri Aurobindo's writings, we find in his treatment of emotions a great paradox together with its synthesis and resolution. On one hand, emotions are presented in the most disparaging terms, as the center stage for all suffering, perversion, and sordid obscurity. On the other hand, emotions are viewed as not only deriving from the ineffable Ananda or Bliss which is the very nature and substance of the Divine Existence, but they are also a powerful means into the very heart of that Ananda. So let us look at this mystery of emotions, examine their nature, and trace the lines of their transmutation and divinization as explained by Sri Aurobindo.

#### Character of human emotion

Let us consider first the nature of normal human emotion. For the typical person, Sri Aurobindo said, emotion is . . .

*similar to the animal's, if more variously developed; its emotions are governed by egoistic passion, blind instinctive affections, often sordid degradations,—a heart besieged and given over to the lusts, desires, wraths, intense or fierce demands or little greeds and mean pettinesses of an obscure and fallen life force and debased by its slavery to any and every impulse.<sup>1</sup>*

We see this character most clearly in certain emotions such as anger, irritation, hatred, jealousy, envy, greed, and lust. But similarly, sadness, despair, and grief typically arise in reaction to the disappointment of an egoistic demand or claim, how-



Larry specialized in the study of emotion as a psychologist. (Photo courtesy Larry Seidlitz)

ever justifiable it may seem. Fear and anxiety both have an instinctive quality, and may arise spontaneously due to conditioning with various harmless stimuli.

These negative emotions are the source of much human suffering, but what about our positive emotions, such as love and joy? Here too when we scratch the surface we often find them to be egoistic in nature and not very pure. We experience joy at the satisfaction of our cherished desires, but inevitably it carries as its shadow disappointment, sadness or anger when these desires are not satisfied. Even love often is ego-centered and ephemeral. We love with an expectation of reward or return. Although we may not be conscious of it, ordinarily we love so that we may be loved, respected, or have our desires satisfied by the other. Moreover, human love, though it can be pure or at least can be purified, readily allies itself with lust, with sexual desire. Human love often is at least partly a bargain, "I will love you if you love me and satisfy my needs." When love does not meet with the return required, it may turn into grief, anger, or even hatred. Thus, in the ordinary experience of the play of emotions, abiding peace or unmixed delight is hardly possible.

#### Enmeshment with the mind

While emotions in themselves color human experience in shifting hues, pleas-

ant and unpleasant, terrible and wonderful, and often just gray and dull, their action is more far reaching in that they also distort the faculties of the intelligence and will. Our thought and decision-making, the choices we pursue are often dictated by our emotions rather than a clear disinterested reason and discrimination which looks dispassionately at things and directs our actions and our lives with a clear-seeing intelligent will. We act based on our emotionally colored preferences and desires, or impulsively out of anger, fear, attraction, pleasure seeking, greed, lust. Our judgment is clouded, our perceptions are narrowed and distorted, our reasoning is used to support our emotional and vital desires and impulses. Thus, our emotions not only bring us suffering and limitation through our experience of them, but they also usurp the control of our higher faculties of reason and judgment that otherwise might provide a more fruitful course of action and experience.

Therefore, because emotions are entangled with the rest of our being, Sri Aurobindo's analysis of them involves several other layers of our complex psychological make-up. He first distinguishes three basic parts of the being: the mind, the life-force or vital, and the body; though the vital links the mind and body and is enmeshed in both of them. The body and the vital together make up what he calls the outer instrument; the conscious mentality constitutes the inner instrument, but this also is pervaded by the vital. The vital in its enmeshment with the mentality is sometimes referred to as the psychic prana. The inner instrument or conscious mentality is differentiated into four principal parts, the *chitta* or basic mental consciousness, the *manas* or sense mind, the *buddhi* or intelligence, and the *ahankara* or the ego-idea. Sri Aurobindo says that every fiber of the *chitta* and *manas*, the basic mental consciousness and the sense mind, is pervaded by the psychic prana, and that usually, the *buddhi* and *ahankara*, the intelligence and ego, also are overpowered by it, though they have the capacity of rising above subjection to it.<sup>2</sup>





## Subconscious basis

The basic mental consciousness or *chitta* is largely subconscious; only a part of it is conscious. It is out of this basic substratum of universal mental consciousness that all the action of the higher parts of the inner instrument—the sense-mind, intelligence, and ego—arise. Sri Aurobindo explains that this *chitta* has two basic kinds of action, one receptive, the other reactive and dynamic. As a passive power, it receives the impacts of things, whether or not consciously perceived, and stores them in its immense subconscious memory. Ordinarily we consciously draw only a little of what we have perceived from this memory, but other material stored there may also exert a subconscious influence upon us. This *chitta* also serves as a storage of memory for the submental vital and physical parts of the nature, and underlies the habits of our vital and physical nature.<sup>3</sup>

Sri Aurobindo explains that our emotions arise out of this substratum of mental consciousness. He writes:

*When it is struck by the world's impacts from outside or urged by the reflective powers of the subjective being, it throws up certain habitual activities, the mould of which has been determined by our evolution. One of these forms of activity is the emotional mind,—the heart, as we may call it for the sake of a convenient brevity. Our emotions are the waves of reaction and response which rise up from the basic consciousness . . . Their action too is largely regulated by habit and an emotive memory. They are not imperative, not laws of necessity . . .*<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo explains that there is a close dependence of this emotional mind

on the psychic prana or life-energy that permeates the *chitta*. This prana introduces into the emotional mind a certain insistent vital craving or desire to seize upon what it feels it does not have, a life-instinct for possession and satisfaction which creates much of the emotional nature's aggressive and obstinate tendencies. The proper function of the psychic prana is pure possession and enjoyment, but the true enjoyment of existence can come only when the object of enjoyment is not things or persons in themselves, but rather the Ananda of the spirit in the things or persons.<sup>5</sup>

All emotion, feeling, and sensation are ways in which the individual soul meets and experiences the manifestations of the Divine in universal nature. Our higher

*All emotion, feeling, and sensation are ways in which the individual soul meets and experiences the manifestations of the Divine in universal nature.*

Self experiences the world with which it is One as a universal delight, Ananda. But the individual soul, a projection of this Self in the lower nature, identifies itself with the lower mind and life-force of the limited ego, and experiences these contacts in various gradations of pain, pleasure, or neutral indifference, depending on its ability to meet, assimilate, and master what it experiences as coming from outside itself. Because of the greater Self within, something in us takes delight in all these contacts, even the painful ones, and grows from them. But to experience this universal Ananda, the instruments of the mind and life must learn to renounce their egoistic, dualistic, preferential and perverse grasping at delight in the world, and enjoy only the essential delight or *rasa* that is in these contacts.<sup>6</sup>

## Experience of Ananda

Sri Aurobindo explains that the experience of this deeper Ananda cannot come in its fullness until we can reflect in our na-

ture our hidden spiritual being, the Self above the mind, life, and body. But before this spiritual part of our being discloses itself, a pure and legitimate human enjoyment of things may be established. Sri Aurobindo says that this enjoyment must be based principally in the perceptive, aesthetic and emotive mind, and only secondarily by the sensational, nervous and physical part of the being, but all subject to the clear rule of the *buddhi*, the intelligence with its reason, feeling for the truth, and sense of order, harmony, and beauty. The mind then can take a pure delight in things while rejecting whatever is troubled or perverse, and the psychic prana can then bring in the full enjoyment of the whole being, which is its proper role.<sup>7</sup>

To summarize these points so far, we have said that the emotions are forms of habitual response to the impacts of things arising out of the *chitta*, the basic mental

consciousness. The *chitta* and the emotions arising from it are only partially conscious, and are enmeshed with the psychic prana or vital life-force. This psychic prana has as its psychological functions enjoyment and possession, but due to its obscurity and sense of limitation and separation in the ego, this ordinarily takes the form of desire, an instinctual craving and grasping at things, which carries as a consequence the sense of need, disappointment, and frustration in its inability to satisfy its endless desires. These characteristics of the psychic prana make their way into all the inner instrument—the sense-mind, the emotional mind, and the intelligence and will. To purify the inner instrument of this enmeshment of the psychic prana, and to purify the prana itself of desire, is the solution to the suffering associated with the emotions.

## Purification

Sri Aurobindo suggests several different lines of discipline that can be pur-



sued singly or in combination to achieve this solution. One important line is to clear the *buddhi* or intelligence and mental will of the distorting influences of the psychic prana. As this progresses, the *buddhi* can be made to respond to the higher truth, understand its own nature and the nature of the lower instruments, and set about a proper ordering and organization of the whole being. However, in order to clear the *buddhi* of these falsifying influences, it is necessary to simultaneously effect a preliminary clearing of the lower parts of the nature—the sense mind, the emotional mind, and the psychic prana itself—of the insistent claims of desire.<sup>8</sup>

To achieve this purification, a clear distinction must be made in one's psychological experience between desire and the will. There is a pure and legitimate will to take delight in the world, but desire is a deformation of this will in the psychic prana. Sri Aurobindo describes the pure will to be a "much more free, tranquil, steady and effective force" than desire.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, desire...

*invades the sensational mind and brings into it the unquiet thirst of sensations, invades the dynamic mind with the lust of control, having, domination, success, fulfillment of every impulse, fills the emotional mind with the desire for the satisfaction of liking and disliking, for the wreaking of love and hate, brings the shrinkings and panics of fear and the strainings and disappointments of hope, imposes the tortures of grief and the brief fevers of and excitements of joy, makes the intelligence and intelligent will the accomplices of all these things and turns them in their own kind into deformed and lame instruments, the will into a*

*will of craving and the intelligence into a partial, a stumbling and an eager pursuer of limited, impatient, militant prejudice and opinion. Desire is the root of all sorrow, disappointment, affliction, for though it has a feverish joy of pursuit and satisfaction, yet because it is always a straining of the being, it carries into its pursuit and its getting a labour, hunger, struggle, a rapid subjection to fatigue, a sense of limitation, dissatisfaction and early disappointment with all its gains, a ceaseless morbid stimulation, trouble, disquiet, asanti.<sup>10</sup>*

*As we develop this relation with the Divine, we see that our relations with the world are all means by which we are prepared for entering into relation with Him.*

### Inner analysis and detachment

Thus to rid all the parts of the mind of desire is indispensable to arrive at the true Ananda of existence. Sri Aurobindo says that "this can only be got rid of by a sort of practical, inward psychological operation of analysis"<sup>11</sup> by which we become aware of the intelligence with its will as a separate power, distinguish these from the psychic prana, and no longer allow the latter to usurp their control, making it instead a transmitting channel for their action, obedient to their commands. The prana then can become a responsive and powerful instrument for the mind's direct control of the physical life.

This process of inner psychological analysis and the rejection of desire in favor of the clear reason and intelligent will should be supported by the development of an inner psychological detachment from the activities of the nature, and in particular from the suggestions and claims of the

desires. The possibility of this detachment, which can become radical and complete, is based on a distinction between the Purusha and Prakriti, that is, between a pure witness consciousness and the activities of the nature. This distinction is at the base of phenomenal existence in which the One Existent becomes conscious of itself as object. For practical considerations, as one can observe one's body and say of it that it is not myself, so we can detach ourselves and withdraw our identification from the activities of our vital and mental nature. We can step back in our consciousness into a tranquil poise of a pure witness and observe the activities of our thoughts and emotions and desires without becoming enmeshed in their activities. This requires an inward orientation and

poise of the consciousness that refuses to identify with the outward pull and leaping of Prakriti. The individual soul must establish its poise in this inner Purusha consciousness

and detach itself from the ceaseless unquiet activity of the outer nature.

From this poise of detachment, it is more possible to establish an effective will to counter the wrong suggestions of the desire nature. Sri Aurobindo explains that the Purusha must . . .

*repel even the least indices or incidence of trouble, anxiety, grief, revolt, disturbance in his mind. If these things come, he must at once detect their source, the defect which they indicate, the fault of egoistic claim, vital desire, emotion or idea from which they start and this he must discourage by his will, his spiritualised intelligence, his soul unity with the Master of his being. On no account must he admit any excuse for them, however natural, righteous in seeming or plausible, or any inner or outer justification.*



*If it is the Prana which is troubled and clamorous, he must separate himself from the troubled Prana, keep seated his higher nature in the Buddhi and by the Buddhi school and reject the claim of the desire-soul in him; and so too if it is the heart of emotion that makes the clamour and the disturbance.*<sup>12</sup>

## Equality

Another movement closely allied with the development of detachment is the cultivation of equality. Sri Aurobindo says equality is “to remain unmoved within in all conditions.”<sup>13</sup> A complete equality can be cultivated which is based, said Sri Aurobindo, on the “sense of the one Self, the one Divine everywhere—seeing the One in spite of all differences, degrees, disparities in the manifestation.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, if one takes the attitude that the Divine is everywhere and in each person and thing and happening, this attitude discourages the tendency to emotionally react either positively or negatively, but rather to regard things dispassionately, to detect the divine in them, and to look more deeply into their significance. This side of the discipline can be very practical; it is an effort and aspiration towards a state in which, as Sri Aurobindo describes it, one is . . .

*not to be touched or disturbed by things that happen or things said or done to you but to look at them with a straight look, free from the distortions created by personal feeling, and to try to understand what is behind them, why they happen, what is to be learnt from them, what is it in oneself which they are cast against and what inner profit or progress one can make out of them; it means self-mastery over the vital movements,—anger and sensitiveness and pride as well as desire and the rest,—not to let them get hold of the emotional being and disturb the inner peace, not to*

*speak and act in the rush and impulsion of these things, always to act and speak out of a calm inner poise of the spirit.*<sup>15</sup>

This is not to say that all things are to be accepted or responded to in the same manner. One is to remain calm, unmoved within, but still one is to act, to choose truth and reject falsehood, and to do so in consonance with the highest light of the reason, or if one is capable, in obedience to a higher guidance from above or deep within. One may even be called to fight and destroy. As Sri Aurobindo said,

*here there is a work to be done, a Truth to be established against which immense forces are arranged, invisible forces which can use visible things and persons and actions for their instruments. If one is among the disciples, the seekers of this Truth, one has to take sides for the Truth, to stand against the forces that attack it and seek to stifle it.*<sup>16</sup>

## Openness to the Divine

The methods discussed so far aimed at the rejection of desire from the mental parts of the being and from the psychic prana—the mental discrimination between the pure will of the *buddhi* and vital desire and the rejection of the latter; the development of an inner detachment of the Purusha consciousness from the activities of Prakriti, and the cultivation of an inner equality—have relied mainly on taking certain mental poises and actions through one’s own personal effort. These methods aimed at bringing calm and purity into the mind and vital can be supplemented by the more spiritual method of calling down the divine Peace, Light and Force from above the mind. These things are already established in our higher consciousness, they have only to be brought down and made effective in our lower nature. In Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga, it is really the Force of the Divine that is the effective agent in the change and transformation of the nature,

though it can and does utilize one’s personal effort in its action:

*In this yoga the whole principle is to open oneself to the Divine Influence. It is there above you and, if you can once become conscious of it, you have then to call it down into you. It descends into the mind and into the body as Peace, as a Light, as a Force that works, as the Presence of the Divine with or without form, as Ananda. Before one has this consciousness, one has to have faith and aspire for the opening. Aspiration, call, prayer are forms of one and the same thing and are all effective; you can take the form that comes to you or is easiest to you.*<sup>17</sup>

This aspiration and opening to the Influence of the Divine is then an effective method to establish an increasing purity and calm in all the parts of the mind and vital and physical consciousness, as well as awakening the spiritual consciousness, the vision and the sense of the Divine everywhere and a contact with the Divine Ananda that is in all things. This aspiration or call to the Divine to come down into us can and should be made by each layer and part of the being—from the mind, life, and even the physical consciousness. Whereas for many people the mind and will most readily ally themselves to this aspiration, the heart and emotional being can also turn to the Divine Influence in a powerful way which is particularly effective in the purification of the emotions and in opening the outer being to the deeper soul within, and to the Ananda or bliss which is the true source and goal of emotional experience. It is this aspiration and seeking of the heart for the Divine that we must elaborate next in Sri Aurobindo’s view of the emotions in yoga.

## Bhakti Yoga

In bhakti yoga, the spiritual path of devotion, the normal types of relation-





ships in human life are directed not towards transient human relations, but towards the Divine Being. It focuses especially on the conception of the Divine in his personality as the divine Lover and enjoyer of the universe, but other relations with the Divine, such as Friend, Teacher, Mother, Father, and even Opponent may also be developed. Sri Aurobindo asserts that the Divine is not limited to an impersonal existence or state, but that the Divine also stands behind all persons and personalities in the universe and is quite capable of entering into personal relationship with the human devotee in whatever form or manner the devotee seeks him. It is through the development and intensification and purification of such relations with the Divine that the emotional being of the devotee can be most readily purified of desire and egoism, and enter into and experience the universal Love and Ananda that is the very nature of the Divine.

This relationship with the Divine may take the form of a relation with a transcendent Being or Presence with whom we feel inwardly connected, supported perhaps by the use of symbols as an aid in making the Presence more tangible, but otherwise independent of physicality. But it also may take the form of a relation with a Being or Presence which expresses itself through all that we meet in the world, through persons, through nature, through objects, through all our inner and outer experiences and events. We can learn to see, hear, smell, taste, touch the Divine in all our contacts with the world, and we can begin to love and enjoy the Divine immanent in all its manifestations. This ampler relation takes us into the mysteries of the divine Love and Ananda, for we then meet and experience the object of our growing love and adoration at each moment, we become surrounded and immersed in the Divine, carried in the arms of our beloved who is the very fount of all love, sweetness, beauty and delight.

As we develop this relation with the Divine, we see that our relations with the world are all means by which we are prepared for entering into relation with Him. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

*All the emotions with which we confront the action of the universal existence upon us, are really directed towards him, in ignorance at first, but it is by directing them in growing knowledge towards him that we enter into more intimate relations with him, and all that is false and ignorant in them will fall away as we draw nearer towards unity. To all of them he answers, taking us in the stage of progress in which are; for if we met no kind of response or help to our imperfect approach, the more perfect relations could never be established. Even as men approach him, so he accepts them and responds too by the divine Love to their bhakti, tathaiva bhajate. Whatever form of being, whatever qualities they lend to him, through that form and those qualities he helps them to develop, encourages or governs their advance and in their straight way or their crooked draws them towards him.*<sup>18</sup>

Sri Aurobindo explains that our relations with the world must more and more be directed consciously towards the Divine, the One Being who stands behind all forms in the universe, and must progressively shed their more earthly and ignorant elements until they become changed into a pure and perfect love. He explains that all other emotions arise from either our seeking or grasping after the delight in existence, from the frustration of our seeking, or from the loss or failure of the delight we thought we had possessed. Only pure love can enter directly into the self-existent delight of the Divine Being; it is, he says, the very body of that Ananda.<sup>19</sup>

### **The psychic being**

All these methods to purify the emotions of desire help to bring forward in their place the true soul, or psychic being. The psychic being is our inmost, usually

hidden self and personality that is centered around the psychic entity, our divine essence, a projection of the divine into our individual existence. This is the true person in us, the divinity in our evolving nature that persists and grows from life to life until the time when it can burst its age-long concealment and come forward and openly and sovereignly lead the external nature to its divine fulfillment.<sup>20</sup>

The psychic being is centered deep within behind the emotional heart center, its presence hidden by the restless and tumultuous activities of the mind, the emotions, and the vital nature. From behind the veil of these activities of our surface nature, and from its own native realm between earthly lives, it directs the course of our evolving being from life to life through the ignorance to its fulfillment in the higher Knowledge. It assimilates the experiences of life, extracts what is useful in them for its growth and development, and builds up in this process through many lives a being expressive of its unique divine individuality. Through the experiences of life, parts of the mind, vital, and physical consciousness become integrated with the psychic being and expressive of it, providing an instrumentation for its expression in the outer life. When these outer instruments are sufficiently purified and prepared to consent to this divine leading, the psychic being can come forward into the outer consciousness and take control of the external life and direct and organize all its movements towards their divine potentialities.

The coming forward of the psychic being into the outer nature depends largely on the development of a sense of love and surrender to the Divine, as these are the native character of the psychic being. As Sri Aurobindo says:

*. . . the main business of the heart, its true function is love. It is our destined instrument of complete union and oneness; for to see oneness in the world by the understanding is not enough unless we also feel it with the heart and in the psychic being, and this means a delight in the*



*One and in all existences in the world in him, a love of God and all beings.<sup>21</sup>*

The coming forward of the psychic being and its control of the nature brings love and adoration, selfless and dedicated service, an increasingly intimate spiritual knowledge and contact, and a growing openness and surrender of all the being to the Divine. Another important function that it brings is an inner guidance that is surer than the mental reason, a perceptive detection and rejection of all that is false and undivine in the nature, a natural, instinctive choice of the Truth and all that leads towards Truth, a spontaneous affinity towards all that is good and beautiful. Its coming forward marks an important turning point in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, for once the psychic being is in direct command of the nature, it can lead the whole being safely and smoothly towards its highest divine possibilities.

## Transformation

Those highest possibilities include a full descent of various powers and qualities of the Divine into the mind life and body leading to a transformation of our limited and hampered human life into a divine living here in the physical world. There are various stages of that transformation, higher and higher powers that successively descend and effect their change and uplifting of the whole nature to their higher and higher levels of consciousness. At a very high peak there is an opening of and descent of what Sri Aurobindo refers to as the Supramental consciousness, the Truth Consciousness, which has the Power to effect a divinization of the physical body and release it from subjection to disease and death. As each of these higher levels of consciousness and transformation are attained and effected, they bring with them the experience and settled realization of a greater power and purity and fullness of the Divine Ananda.

In Sri Aurobindo's view, the nature of the Divine is Sachchidananda, an infinite existence, consciousness, and bliss, three

inseparable qualities that in the highest experience are One. There is no assignable limit to the intensity and absoluteness of the subjective experience of Ananda. As the physical universe in which we dwell is a creation or manifestation of the Divine—it comes from that bliss, exists in that delight, and carries that ecstasy within it. It is the intention of the evolution of which we are a part to release that Ananda from its imprisonment in human life with its grasping and suffering emotions, which are at once ignorant and egoistic gropings after that Delight, and the divided and distorted expressions of it in a consciousness only partly emerged from the self-oblivion of inconscient matter. The fullness of Ananda comes with Oneness of our consciousness and nature with the Divine; suffering comes from limitation and separation of our consciousness and nature from the Divine. A purified Love and a sincere surrender of our whole being to the Divine are at once a path towards, and the very nature of, that Oneness and Delight.

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- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 632.
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 629-630.
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- <sup>13</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, p. 661, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, India, 1971.
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 664.
- <sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 661-662.
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 665.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 604-605.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 534.
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 535.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 141.
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## A way forward

by James Anderson

*This article describes the author's unique journey through his body's challenges into a more meaningful way. It opens a window to the fact that there are many resources that can be brought forward to face any longstanding physical difficulty. Instead of sinking beneath the burden, one can allow the spirit to move the body.*

I sometimes marvel at the twists and turns of my life. It was only after I had set foot in India that my course assumed anything like a straight line. In retrospect, everything seems to have happened at the most appropriate time. Just living has become my best schooling. Everything, I sometimes sense, has been synchronized by an 'unseen hand,' a viewpoint that seems to be in accord with what the Mother says of the soul's journeys through many lives. Deep down, I realize that the soul had chosen such experiences to more fully evolve.

I've always liked 'happy endings' so I aspire that this is a journey that will ultimately lead to truth and wholeness. I am ready, if She wills, for my personal healing to continue until I draw my last breath. I also recognize clearly that something in me had originally taken a detour from this path of wholeness. Something in me, for whatever reason, had been not wholly 'true' and that only created a vibration which resonated with life-threatening illness. However, in many ways, this life journey is not so unique. Virtually all of us, I feel, conceal some sort of canker which is not in resonance with the Divine Truth. So in such conditions, I believe that I must learn how to make best use of whatever raw materials are at hand to lead the being back to a state of divine health.

When I arrived here in Pondicherry ten years ago, I had come overloaded with baggage. I had left England in answer to an imperative call: there had to be *another way*. What was the reason behind this existence after all? Something deep inside



was stirring and I could no longer ignore it. I was in a rut. As a boy, I had undergone a conventional Western education and upbringing. Apart from my quasi-religious roots, little had encouraged me to look outside the conventional material-istic paradigm that had become so enmeshed around me.

On the surface, it seemed my physical condition too could quite adequately be summarized within this convenient formula. Any effect on the body, it reasoned, had a material cause behind: any material cause produced an inexorable material result. Within this framework, the prospects for this body certainly didn't look good. It seemed that the actual material consequence, atrophy and degeneration, had already been sown. A hard life of coping and irreversible decay lay ahead.

To tell the truth however, that conviction had started to waver for quite a while. I had started asking questions and was full of doubts. I had been investigating new healing techniques for some time but most of these almost appeared inadequate and superficial. What I really thirsted for was a *total* foundation and new approach not just for my healing but my entire existence on this earth.

So when I came here, I was like a flower imploring to be plucked! I now know the Mother answered my call. I am so grateful for that. I started to read as many of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's works as I could. On turning every page, I felt more and more like I was being swept into their vision of a New Age. The notion of spirit transforming matter was explained with enormous depth and clarity. I had found my well of wisdom and started to drink in colossal gulps. I now felt I was ready to make that critical leap of faith. I started to look for positives; my life had decisively taken a new course. To my infinite gratitude, I felt that the Divine Grace had presented me with no other alternative: it seemed as if I had been left no other choice.

As the Mother states, somehow the body must be made to understand that the outer form can be healed through an alchemy inside. Underlying a crust of doubt,



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however, there has always been a degree of receptivity and faith but I did find the body consciousness itself, initially at least, needed some gentle initiation and nurturing.

The Mother says that:

*... there is a preparation which may be of a general kind. That is, to accustom the body methodically to understand that it is only the outer expression of a truer and deeper reality and that it is this truer and deeper reality which governs its destiny—though one is not usually aware of it.*

*One can prepare the body through a series of observations, studies, understandings, by showing it examples, making it understand things as one makes a child understand them, either by observing its own movements—but generally, in this, one is comparatively blind! —or by observing those of others. And, in a more general way, this preparation will be based on recognised studies, on clear facts.<sup>1</sup>*

Self-observation became my principal way of evaluation. I started working on

myself from inside. Quite soon, I became aware of a marked improvement in my posture and movement after I had gone through the process of inwardly aligning myself.

Through repetition, an understanding and greater faith in the body, it seems, has gradually emerged. On the whole, experience has given the body the understanding it needed. So, for me, these 'clear facts' that the Mother speaks about are largely gauged through self-observation. Through this way, I have found that the body can be taught that there is indeed a Force that acts.

I myself have found it prudent never to stop this 'education' because whenever the consciousness comes to the surface (which it inevitably does) and focuses on the external form, doubt has the habit of appearing once more. The body, *tamasic* by nature, can easily lapse into old ways. The physical mind can then cast its long, dark shadow. This part of the being is described by Sri Aurobindo here: "That part of the mind which is concerned with physical things only; it depends on the sense-mind, sees only objects, external actions, draws its ideas from the data given by external things, infers from them only and knows no Truth until it is enlightened from above."<sup>2</sup>

## Consciousness

Therefore from this base, the work can unfold:

*Gradually, if you make use of this understanding, you must, with a methodical work of infusing consciousness into the cells of the body, infuse at the same time the truth of the divine Presence. This work takes time, but if done methodically and constantly, it produces an effect.*

*So you have prepared the ground."<sup>3</sup>*

Up to this point, I have to admit that the body had become a largely neglected instrument. To tell the truth, it had seemed





to be too big an obstacle to tackle. Aside from the occasional deferral to physical activity, the body had been deprived of any true semblance of consciousness. Deep down lay a denial of its worth, perhaps even a rejection of its very nature. The body had 'let me down'. To say that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's teachings brought an instant about-turn in this perspective would be a vast exaggeration, but their insights have gradually percolated down into my being. Even at this juncture, ten years on, there is perhaps a grey ascetic in me that tries to question the validity of Sri Aurobindo's vision of a "divine life in a divine body."<sup>4</sup>

Essentially, I feel, the nature of this work is very simple. Perhaps it is not a matter of even placing yourself in the hands of the Divine, but rather to just *stop* and allow yourself to get *picked up* by Her. Sri Ramakrishna's 'baby-cat' attitude immediately comes to mind. This is the truest surrender. For some people, indeed, this movement is evidently not so simple. Perhaps that is one reason why the Mother set great store on the virtue of simplicity. Perhaps it takes a simple mind to perform a simple task to perfection whereas a complex nature might evoke an excessively detoured approach.

With simplicity comes humility. I try to continually recognize that there is an infinitely greater power than the mind. The mind can be terribly arrogant at times but really, as I understand, it has no creative capacity as such. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have continually affirmed that the mind amounts to no more than a mere plaything for larger forces. From that viewpoint then, all one can meaningfully contribute to this exercise is to keep quiet and observe the Mother do Her work. For many, that may sound very little but to observe with true consciousness introduces an entirely new element into the play. Consciousness, Sri Aurobindo says, is not only *cit* but also *shakti*. It comes from "being aware of anything through identifica-

tion. The Divine Consciousness not only knows but effects."<sup>5</sup>

So when I gaze at something with consciousness, I know the Mother's Force is simultaneously present.

### The work

To observe the body with consciousness then, not only allows the Mother to do Her work unimpeded; it also acts as Her searchlight to dissolve anything that is not true. So, before embarking on any work inside, I always take the time to invoke Their Presence. That invariably brings my consciousness back to home. I then start scanning the body inwardly from top to bottom, pausing at each energy center. I observe the body in a detached way and try to be as disinterested as possible.

*I don't go 'down' into the body but try to keep my station above and call the Mother to apply Her Light and Force on the body itself.*

Mindful of Sri Aurobindo's advice, I don't go 'down' into the body but try to keep my station above and call the Mother to apply Her Light and Force on the body itself. There is often the deepest intimacy in this work. It is as if I am completely alone with Her, totally absorbed in the task at hand. I don't look for deformations. If they are present, they will rise naturally to the surface under the sheer pressure of the awareness. When that happens, I stop and give this block or knot my fullest attention and gently enquire into its cause. If I am quiet and attentive enough, She will always give me the answer. When the answer comes, I might choose to repeat it aloud because, by expressing the knowledge, the distortion immediately disappears. When the body is living in the Truth, there is no longer any room for distortion.

Her Force, sooner or later, starts to flow unimpeded throughout the body. When harmony and balance is restored, I

generally finish by observing the feet. One has to be grounded for this work. Finally, when the body is clear and inwardly aligned, with consciousness, I entreat the Mother to impregnate Her Presence into every cell of my body. That always evokes in me the deepest sense of love and gratitude. When the work is complete, the entire body sometimes celebrates in a delight of peace and rapture.

### Method

The Mother always chooses Her words so prudently. But why "methodical," you may ask? This is because the body, a creature of habit, really only understands 'methods' as such. Methods imply repetition. By adopting a method and constantly repeating it, you are simply speaking the language of the body. And it is habits that can so cramp the body. My past conditioning surfaces through habits; they become like grooves in the nature. The more I try

to expand, the more aware I become of how much they throttle my growth. They can easily develop into a physical affliction and so fetter any progress in the body. As a consequence, I feel that unless I withdraw my consent to habit, my body will surely become its slave. It can become encrusted like a thick mould. Sri Aurobindo states: "The physical nature is a thing of habits; it is out of habit that it responds to the forces of illness; one has to get into it the contrary habit of responding to the Divine Force only."<sup>6</sup>

Withdrawing my consent is one thing but since most of these patterns are derived from the subconscious, unearthing these roots can only be achieved by constantly invoking the Mother's Force into every facet of the being. Eventually, I trust, it will filter down into the entire nature. At times it is a hard battle, so in this regard I find a regularity in practice and consistency of approach very helpful. I have to



become more enduring than the habit itself. And dissolving habits, is I feel, one sure road to freedom.

A dogged resolution is required—a persistent will. The searchlight, I believe, should never be left standing idle. Here, I feel, is where I have to be methodical. I can't expect overnight success. As the Mother says, the work takes time:

*“When one wants to change something of the material life, whether the character or the functioning of the organs or habits, one must have an unfaltering perseverance, be ready to begin again a hundred times the same thing with the same intensity with which one did it the first time and as though one had never done it before.*

*People who are touchy cannot do this. But if one can't do it, one can't do yoga, in any case not the integral yoga, one can't change one's body.*

*To change one's body one must be ready to do millions of times the same thing, because the body is a creature of habits and functions by routine, and because to destroy a routine one must persevere for years.”<sup>7</sup>*

## Truth

Truth, to me, implies wholeness: the two go hand in hand. The state of Divine Truth affords perfect health; anything else is totally inconsistent with that concept. The seed of Truth has already been planted by the Mother into the earth. Every atom of matter conceals and contains this Truth. It is our work, I feel, to help bring this forward so that every part of the material substance can become 'true.' We are each given a body for our field for progress; that is our domain. Obviously then, any anomaly in our physical condition is a deformation and consequently 'untrue.' Any deformation in our being leads to disharmony, disequilibrium and ultimately ill-health.

In the same way, each of us, I feel, possesses our own Truth. As part of the multiplicity, each of us is given a unique nature. The Mother says that, “each individual being has a direct and unique relation with the Supreme, the Origin, That which is beyond all creation. It is this unique relation which must be expressed in one's life, through a unique mode of being in relation with the Divine.”<sup>8</sup>

When we follow our true role on earth, I believe, we are taking our proper place on the stage of the Divine Play. So when we live in our truth, we are resonating with this new Force that has descended into earth and matter. So for me, to be 'whole' translates into living in my truth, no more, no less. Likewise, whenever I live in my truth, a sense of wholeness returns. It is like a never-ending circle. My body becomes imbued with true consciousness and automatically a greater strength, lightness and poise returns. A joy accompanies my steps: a joy of being whole and true.

So when I live in the external mind, I simply struggle. I realize now that the heart is more my true abode. For me, it is a matter of continually withdrawing from the surface and dwelling there. The necessity to 'step back' and find my true inner poise always returns. The Mother speaks about the heart here: “The deeper you go, the less the mixture. And if you go deep enough, you find the feeling absolutely pure, behind. It is a question of depth.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the deeper I go, the closer I move towards the radiance of the psychic being itself. So when I plunge deep inside the heart, I come under the influence of the soul, the inner temple of sweetness and love. This indeed is the truth of my being.

## Connections

The Mother has often said that the inner governs the outer being. The consciousness has to first change for any transformation of the body to be conclusive. However, like many of us here, I sometimes find myself in a stage of transition. In this beautiful laboratory of ours, I sometimes sense that each of us represents a microcosm of the world at large and

Sri Aurobindo has often stated that man is himself a transitional species.

For me personally, I have observed that there is frequently a divide between the inner poise and outer condition. Even after I have aligned myself inside, I can still often experience friction within the body itself. I feel this is simply because the true consciousness has not yet filtered through to the outer parts. Links always have to be made with the physical outposts of my being. An indefatigable patience is required.

Whenever I have sat in concentration and approach a conclusion, I try to disengage the consciousness gradually, by first slowly opening the eyes, but more importantly by allowing the consciousness to spread slowly outwards, to and beyond the body so it becomes vast. I feel it is always better not to 'cut off' too quickly. The objective, after all, is to always hold the vibration of this consciousness and to infuse that into the body itself. A steady vigilance is required because there is always a tendency, if the attention slips, to revert back to the surface consciousness.

I sometimes find a similar situation when I go up to Sri Aurobindo's or the Mother's room. When there, if I am open enough, I often find myself being lifted up to sublime heights. When I start to descend the stairs, however, my consciousness occasionally starts to descend with me. Before I know it, if I don't maintain this vigilance, the consciousness will have followed the body down to the ground!

It is one thing instilling consciousness when the body is in a static and relaxed state. Indeed, the necessity for calling down the Force in this poise is indisputable. The basis for true power, Mother says, lies in a perfect immobility. The dynamics of movement clearly depend on this condition. Very often too, I experience a strong surge of power vibrating throughout the body when I am seated and inwardly aligned. In such circumstances, the power is latent and held back. But there comes a time when it has to be translated into action. The muscles too need their nourishment and deep down, when conscious, they can find a simple joy



in constructive exercise.

I always start by just standing and try to find the right posture. Very often, I may start fidgeting as the mind tries to rule the roost, but when it quietens and as the body connects to my truth inside, an outer alignment will effortlessly follow. It usually arrives unheralded and is invariably spontaneous.

## Movement

I still find it very challenging to maintain this level of consciousness in everyday actions. When pursuing outer activities, even just walking, I often get distracted, my surface consciousness starts to take over. This trait alludes to one of the chief difficulties in our yoga: the fusion of the inner and outer worlds. Until they meet, I feel that any talk of transformation is totally churlish. Joining the two, I believe, is the essence and objective of our *sadhana*.

Again, the Mother's advice to 'step back' becomes very invaluable and can always, in every instance, be followed. However, simply to call Her name is, for me, the surest way. By immersing myself in Her, She can be with me on every step of the way. However, I don't feel a mechanical calling will get me very far. Somehow the heart has to intervene. That is easier said than done, particularly when I am passing through a grey, barren patch when everything seems so dry and pointless. In such circumstances, I try to tell myself that the phase will soon pass and the sunlight will eventually break through any wisp of cloud. Sometimes one must simply endure.

The nature, I find, has erected its own defense mechanisms. Being in this body is not always the most comfortable existence. That, I guess, is largely because I haven't fully detached my consciousness from it. It sometimes gets entangled in what it is trying to observe. Sometimes too the parts of the lower nature get complete-

ly knotted and it is not always easy to distinguish one from the other. On such occasions, these parts can even choke my true centre inside.

So, now and then, I find myself trying to 'escape' from the play and drift off into an imaginary world or cloud nine. At least I am aware of this tendency and the awareness, or rather the consciousness of it, is usually enough to arrest the retreat. Difficulties will never go away by running away from them. They will always follow me as long as I don't have the courage and faith to face them.

Whenever the surface mind tries to take over, problems also ensue. When in movement, I might find myself disengaging the consciousness from the body be-

*When I keep the proper poise and align myself inside, the right station is regained. The psychic being steps forward and starts to radiate outwards.*

cause the mind doesn't approve of the picture it sees. Now and then a fierce little 'critic' surfaces whose only desire is to cast a shadow of doubt and negativity. The body then gets swamped in a haze of devaluation and judgment and it inevitably shrinks.

I also find it very important not to identify with the difficulty itself. If I get absorbed and wrapped up in the problem, the problem will simply engulf me. When I get immersed in the drama, I only disconnect from the Force. In movement and action as in everything else, I try to heed Sri Aurobindo's advice: to keep my station above, maintain the level of consciousness and *infuse* that, if you like, into the difficulty. Otherwise, I only become the difficulty itself.

When I keep the proper poise and align myself inside, the right station is regained. The psychic being steps forward and starts to radiate outwards. An understanding develops which is beyond mere mental evaluation: things just fall into their

true place. And when I move, a 'true movement' can naturally emerge, a movement that is more in consonance with the truth of my being. Everywhere, inside and out, Truth is restored and any sense of identity with the difficulty dissolves. By affirming to the difficulty, "I am *not* this difficulty," I find the problem quickly fades away. This is no mere lip-service, this basic truth can become lived and understood.

Once such distinctions are made, the whole being can then reverberate in joy. Harmony is restored and an inner equilibrium is maintained—perfect health does not seem such an illusion after all! When this point is reached, the *only* identity is exclusively with Her and She is always my best refuge and sanctuary.

## The Grace

I don't consider that hope is sufficient if one really wants to definitively change the body. I believe that only a complete trust in

the divine Grace will bring the necessary transformation. The occasional trough is, I guess, inevitable but I believe that an abiding faith in the Mother's Grace is essential. It is the Grace that has brought me thus far and it is the Grace that will take me much further. The Grace has ensured that I receive the necessary lessons in life. It was the Grace that had accompanied me to the threshold of death and taken me back into its arms again. It is the Grace which has escorted me in each of my hesitant steps to recovery. I feel the hand of Grace picking me up after every stumble and fall. If I look back at the milestones of my life, I feel its imprint in every dimension. I feel it so tangibly that my heart wells up with gratitude for what it has done. But I do find it better not to project end-results onto it. Why try to limit the Illimitable? In quieter moments I am just content to place myself in its hands. Indeed the Grace knows what is best for me.

The best condition for opening to the Grace, perhaps, is true aspiration. If my as-





piration is sincere and true, the Grace will eventually lead me to the goal.

On this particular subject, the Mother was once asked about what happens if you see a shooting star at night. If you notice one and aspire for something at the same time, the child wondered, will your aspiration be fulfilled within a year? In answer, the Mother drew from Her own experience:

*I had the opportunity to make this experiment. Exactly this. The moment the star was passing, at that very moment there sprang up from the consciousness: 'To realise the divine union, for my body.' That very moment.*

*And before the end of the year, it was done.*

*But it was not because of the star! It was because that dominated my whole consciousness and I was thinking of nothing but that, I wanted only that, thought only of that, acted only for that. So, this thing which generally takes a whole lifetime—it is said the minimum time is thirty-five years!—before twelve months had passed, it was done.*

*But that was because I thought only of that.*

*And it was because I was thinking only of that, that just when the star flashed by I could formulate it—not merely a vague impression—formulate it in precise words like this: 'To realise union with the Divine', the inner Divine, the thing we speak of, the very thing we speak of.*

*Therefore, what is important is not the star but the aspiration. The star is like an outer demonstration, nothing else. But it is not necessary to have a shooting star in order to realise swiftly! What is necessary is that the whole will of the being should be concentrated on one point.<sup>10</sup>*

I believe that when I fix my entire will on an aim, the universe will invariably an-



*A pink rose, to which the Mother gave the significance, loving surrender.*

swer. But I must be resolute to the point of obstinacy—I can't afford to waver. The aspiration must be ready at all times. Deep down, this body has a simple aspiration too. I know it accords with the truth of my being. Whatever is true inside of me articulates it quite clearly, "Make the body a worthy instrument for Your work." I can't ask for more than that. So I'll keep this aspiration for ever close to my heart until it is fulfilled. Until then, I'll keep an eye out for the next star that passes me by.

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# Source Material

## Death and rebirth

by Sri Aurobindo

The soul takes birth each time, and each time a mind, life and body are formed out of the materials of universal nature according to the soul's past evolution and its need for the future.

When the body is dissolved, the vital goes into the vital plane and remains there for a time, but after a time the vital sheath disappears. The last to dissolve is the mental sheath. Finally the soul or psychic being retires into the psychic world to rest there till a new birth is close.

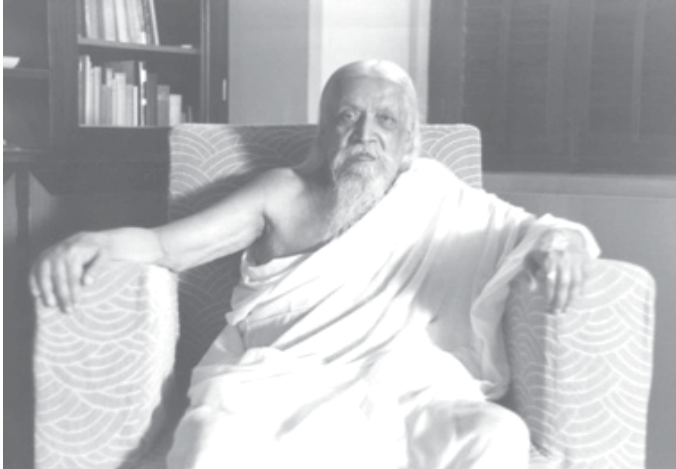
This is the general course for ordinarily developed human beings. There are variations according to the nature of the individual and his development. For example, if the mental is strongly developed, then the mental being can remain; so also can the vital, provided they are organized by and centered around the true psychic being; they share the immortality of the psychic.

The soul gathers the essential elements of its experiences in life and makes that its basis of growth in the evolution; when it returns to birth it takes up with its mental, vital, physical sheaths so much of its Karma as is useful to it in the new life for further experience.

It is really for the vital part of the being that *ārāddha* and rites are done—to help the being to get rid of the vital vibrations which still attach it to the earth or to the vital worlds, so that it may pass quickly to its rest in the psychic peace. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 433)

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There is after death a period in which one passes through the vital world and lives there for a time. It is only the first part of this transit that can be dangerous or painful; in the rest one works out, under certain surroundings, the remnant of the vital desires and instincts which one had



Sri Aurobindo in 1950. (Courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

in the body. As soon as one is tired of these and able to go beyond, the vital sheath is dropped and the soul after a time needed to get rid of some mental survivals passes into a state of rest in the psychic world and remains there till the next life on earth.

One can help the departed souls by one's good will or by occult means, if one has the knowledge. The one thing that one should not do is to hold them back by sorrow for them or longings or by anything else that would pull them nearer to earth or delay their journey to their place of rest. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 436)

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It may happen to some not to realise for a little time that they are dead, especially if the death has been unforeseen and sudden, but it cannot be said that it happens to all or to most. Some may enter into a state of semi-unconsciousness or obsession by a dark inner condition created by their state of mind at death, in which they realise nothing of where they are, etc., others are quite conscious of the passage. It is true that the departing being in the vital body lingers for some time near the body or the scene of life very often for as many as eight days and, in the ancient religions, mantras and other means were used for the severance.

Even after the severance from the body a very earthbound nature or one full of strong physical desires may linger long in the earth-atmosphere up to a maximum period extended to three years. Afterwards, it passes to the vital worlds, proceeding on its journey which must sooner or later bring it to the psychic rest till the next life. It is true also that sorrow and mourning for the dead impede their progress by keeping them tied to the earth-atmosphere and pulling them back from their passage. (*Letters on Yoga*, pp. 436-437)

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The movement of the psychic being dropping the outer sheaths on its way to the psychic plane is the normal movement. But there can be any number of variations; one can return from the

vital plane and there are many cases of an almost immediate birth, sometimes even attended with a complete memory of the events of the past life.

Hell and heaven are often imaginary states of the soul or rather of the vital which it constructs about it after its passing. What is meant by hell is a painful passage through the vital or lingering there, as for instance, in many cases of suicide where one remains surrounded by the forces of suffering and turmoil created by this unnatural and violent exit. There are, of course, also worlds of mind and vital worlds which are penetrated with joyful or dark experiences. One may pass through these as the result of things formed in the nature which create the necessary affinities, but the idea of reward or retribution is a crude and vulgar conception which is a mere popular error.

There is no rule of complete forgetfulness in the return of the soul to rebirth. There are, especially in childhood, many impressions of the past life which can be strong and vivid enough, but the materializing education and influence of the environments prevent their true nature from being recognized. There are even a great number of people who have definite recollections of a past life. But these things are discouraged by education and the atmosphere and cannot remain or develop; in most cases they are stifled out of existence. At the same time it must be noted that what the psychic being carries away with it and brings back is ordinarily the essence of the experiences it had in former lives, and not the details so that you cannot expect the same memory as one has of the present existence. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 437)

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The psychic being's choice at the time of death does not work out the next formation of personality, it fixes it. When it enters the psychic world, it begins to assimilate the essence of its experience and by that assimilation is formed the future psychic personality in accordance with the fixation already made. When this assimilation is over, it is ready for a new birth; but the less developed beings do not work out the whole thing for themselves, there are beings and forces of the higher world who have that work. Also, when it comes to birth, it is not sure that the forces of the physical world will not come across the working out of what it wanted—its own new instrumentation may not be strong enough for that purpose; for, there is the interaction of its own energies and the cosmic forces here. There may be frustration, diversion, a partial working out—many things may happen. All that is not a rigid machinery, it is a working out of complex forces. It may be added, however, that a developed psychic being is much more conscious in this transition and works out much of it itself. The time depends also on the development and on a certain rhythm of the being—for some there is practically immediate rebirth, for others it takes longer, for some it may take centuries; but here, again, once the psychic being is sufficiently developed, it is free to choose its own rhythm and its own intervals. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 444)



## The continuation of the psychized parts of the being

by the Mother

*“In rebirth it is not the external being, that which is formed by parents, environment and circumstances,—the mental, the vital and the physical,—that is born again: it is only the psychic being that passes from body to body. Logically, then, neither the mental nor the vital being can remember past lives or recognise itself in the character or mode of life of this or that person. The psychic being alone can remember; and it is by becoming conscious of our psychic being that we can have at the same time exact impressions about our past lives. Besides, it is much more important for us to fix our attention upon what we want to become than upon what we have been.” (Collected Works of the Mother (CWM), Vol. 15, p. 124)*

*If it is not the mind, vital or physical which take birth again but only the psychic being, then the vital or mental progress made before is of no value in another life?*

It happens only to the extent the progress of these parts has brought them close to the psychic, that is, to the extent the progress lies in putting all the parts of the being successively under the psychic influence. For all that is under the psychic influence and identified with the psychic continues, and it is that alone which continues. But if the psychic is made the center of one’s life and consciousness, and if the whole being is organised around it, the whole being passes under the psychic influence, becomes united with it, and can continue—if it is necessary for it to continue. Indeed, if the physical body could be given the same movement—the same movements of progress and the same capacity to ascend that the psychic being has—well, it wouldn’t be necessary for it to decompose. But that indeed is the difficulty.

And only that which is in contact with the psychic lasts, and only what can last can remember, for the rest disappears, is again dissolved into small pieces and utilized elsewhere—as the body is dissolved again to dust and used elsewhere. It goes back to the earth, plants use the soil, men eat the plants. It is in this way that it goes on. And then it returns to the earth and begins again. That’s the way Nature progresses. In order to progress she makes a heap of forms, then, when that seems no longer important or necessary to her, she demolishes them, takes up all the elements again, chemical or other, and reconstitutes something else, and so it goes on changing all the time, coming and going. And she finds that very good, for she sees very far, her work extends over centuries, and a small human life is nothing, just a breath in eternity. So she takes up, shapes; she takes a certain time, it’s fun for her, she finds it very good; and then, when it is no longer so good, she demolishes it—she takes up, mixes everything, begins another



The Mother. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

form, makes something else. And so perhaps with this process which is evidently very slow, finally the whole of matter progresses. It is possible—always in this way, intermingling, breaking up, remixing, breaking up again. Essentially, it is as though one made a heap of small objects and then destroyed them, remade something from the dust, remade other toys, and again broke them, and remade others out of that. Each time one adds something so that it mixes well. And then, one day, perhaps all that will produce something. In any case, she is in no hurry. And when we are in a hurry, she says: “Why are you in such a haste? It is sure to happen one day. You don’t need to worry, it will surely come. Wait quietly.” Then we tell her: “But it is not I who am waiting!”—“Ah! that’s because you call ‘I’ that thing which comes and goes away. If you were to call consciousness—the one, eternal and divine consciousness—if you were to call that ‘I’, then you would see everything, you would witness everything. Nobody prevents you from doing it! It is only because you identify yourself with this (*indicating the body*). You have only to stop identifying yourself with that.” (CWM, Vol. 5, pp. 358-360)

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The condition of your being after death depends very much on whether the vital has been converted here or not. If you are only a medley of unorganized impulses, then at death, when the consciousness withdraws into the background, the different personalities in you fall apart, rushing hither and thither to seek their own suitable environments. One part may enter into another person who has an affinity for it, another may even enter an animal, while that which has been alive to the divine Presence may remain attached to the central psychic being. But if you are fully organised and converted into a single individual, bent on reaching the goal of evolution, then you will be conscious after death and preserve a continuity. (CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 144-145)





## The poetry room

### The footprints of the Immeasurable

In my soul's sacred mansion,  
Do set thy feet, O Lord!  
Let a storm of delight invade  
The spaces of my heart!

I've cleaned all the temple premises,  
Decked the windows with festoon-flowers;  
In the empty central hall  
I've placed for thee a majestic couch of love.  
And then on the doorstep,  
Dumbly for thee I wait,  
Scanning the roadside. My eyes wandering  
From desolate street to desolate seat.

A glitter are your earrings,  
Your attire like lightning glows,  
A cool Venus-smile lights your face,  
You wear your favorite feather crown,  
Your caressing hand holds the flute;  
This image of yours, O Lord,  
Again and again flashes in my mind.

The evening like deep, dark curtain falls.  
It is all over now: gone the light of puja lamps,  
Gone too the scent of incense sticks.  
Yet of your coming there is no sign.  
My tired eyes droop and  
My body on the threshold slouches.  
My restless mind keeps asking:  
"Will the Lord not come any more?"

Night sweeps black on the battlefield.  
Star-flowers dry and die as in a desert.  
Dark clouds gather in flocks.  
Gushing winds herd into my yard.  
And knocking on the door, someone roars:  
"I am here, I am here."

I open my eyes. As though still in dream,  
I ask: "Who could be visiting now?"  
And the voice thundered once again:  
"See, I have come to your house today!"  
My startled mind, my stunned heart, gasped:  
"Could HE really have arrived?"

"How could I enter your tiny temple?  
"How would I sit on that little couch?"

"How could your most sumptuous banquets  
Appease my taste or my appetite?"  
An awe-inspiring figure kissing the skies  
Laughing aloud, questioned me.

Dark rain-clouds his vestures are.  
Dawn's rippling light is his radiant face.  
The comets he wears to adorn his ears,  
And the Milky Way his necklace is.  
The immutable mount Meru he holds as stick,  
With the sky as dome overhead,  
Who was this standing statue?

I will tear down the temples  
To make for spacious grounds.  
I will rip open my heart  
For you to place your feet.  
Into thy universal platter  
I shall offer all I have lived.  
My own body, O Lord, I shall spread  
As carpet on the path you tread.  
You have chosen to appear in  
Your frightening form,  
I have chosen to submit and to bear.

I have opened the fortress of my inner self,  
Expecting any moment the thunderbolt wound.  
But then, lo and behold, what happened:  
The immeasurable figure shrunk,  
To the measure of a thumb,  
Entered my heart's sanctuary  
Where as was now light and light and light.

In my soul's sacred mansion, thou has set thy feet  
And a storm of delight invades the spaces of my heart.  
—Sundaram

### I saw you

From that far,  
From so near,  
I have seen you.

Someone's lovely at a distance,  
Someone's comely when close by.  
But near or far,  
Charming you are,  
Forever unchanged,  
Ever comely, ever lovely, enchantress.

I was wondering:  
How did it happen  
This fragment from heaven  
Fell to earth?



Questioning, I shut my eyes.  
A curtain opened to reveal:  
The universal chakra, the ever rotating wheel,  
Whose bars were golden shafts of light,  
The rim a brilliant rainbow.

And at the centre-hub  
A statuesque beauty sweet  
Shone upon her lotus seat.

The soft sparks of the clustered stars  
Gathered in her rose-red hands,  
Raised as if in blessings.  
Her intent gaze seemed to say:  
“I have known you for centuries.  
And I have awaited you ever since.”

I implored her:  
“Bestow on this impoverished earth,  
A beauty, that everyone, from everywhere,  
In every way could always receive.  
From your compassion’s cascade,  
May no one ever go unslaked.”

Her luminous lips shone more  
In an answering smile;  
Then from that circling wheel  
She snatched a shaft and shot at me  
Her blade of beauty.  
Her lips still bright with the same sweetness.

I sank into a soothing slumber.  
Where did she strike,  
I do not remember.

When my eye awoke,  
I saw you there on earth,  
The self-same beauty, that very charm;  
The symbol of my prayers  
Perfected, personified.

I look at you again and again,  
From far and near,  
With open eyes or shut,  
You are present,  
Always, everywhere.  
O beauty incarnate  
There is none your like down here.

This occult story, eh,  
Why did I recount today?

—Sundaram

### In the guise of a flower

I will come to thee in the guise of a flower.  
Thou, a child playing under a shady tree;  
Plop, I shall land onto thy head  
And drink of thy eyes, the simple surprise.  
I shall enjoy to be a toy in thy hands,  
Although petal by petal dismembering me  
Thou shalt scatter me to the sky.

I shall come to thee in the guise of a flower.  
Thou, a maiden, full of life and longings—  
I shall sway in the bouquet on thy braid,  
Dangle from the ears and tingle thy cheek;  
Be a wreath round your wrist,  
Enchanting every heart; whilst thou  
Hovering high on some dream-bough  
Shalt forget me totally.

I shall come to thee in the guise of a flower.  
Thou, a handsome youth, attractive fop,—  
In the buttonhole, seated, smugly  
Near to thy heart, I shall kiss thy fingers  
Off and on. Thy mind would go rambling  
Here, there, everywhere.  
How would you ever heed, alas  
That I, only I, am listening to thy throbbing heart!

I shall come to thee in the guise of a flower.  
Thou, revered and famous, a favourite figure—  
I, a fully fragrant garland, hanging  
To thy knees, shall swing rhythmically  
To the cadence of thy steps.  
When thy loving thoughts, preoccupied  
With noble sentiments, shall travel  
Far and wide, I too shall flow with them  
Wandering over earth, her people, their cultures.

I shall come to thee in the guise of a flower.  
Having transcended all human limitations  
Godlike thou, a being aglow with wisdom;  
I, an immaculate heap of jasmine bloom,  
Content to rest at thy feet,  
To mingle in their dust  
Infused with my fragrance.  
Then, when thy soul with the Supreme  
Shall in conference be, I shall as doorman  
Protect—whiter and purer than ever.

I shall come to thee in the guise of a flower.

—Sundaram



**AsIs**  
**A moment of remembrance**

No more struggle  
Nor strife, just  
Opening to  
Descent  
Supreme.  
And there it is—  
The long waited  
Downpour  
In the early  
Hour of a being  
Awakening to itself.  
And the Earth was glad,  
Her face beaming  
With a new light.

“So, you have arrived,  
My child,” the Mother smiled.  
“Let me take you into My gardens and  
Give you a walk through the golden-domed  
Mansion in their midst. Sitting in its inner  
Chamber, gazing at the crystal ball of  
Its main receptor, soon you will  
Remember all, to minutest  
Detail, and realize that  
You have never left  
Your home.”

The birds and the flowers,  
The trees and the creeks,  
The smoke veiling the mountains  
And the clouds flirting with the sunbeams,  
Autumnal wind gently playing with the leaves  
On less trodden paths to the heart of things,  
Everything in awakened Nature, from  
Below and above, from within and  
Without, sang the song of  
Welcome to her. And  
She was healed.

—Dhyaanavati

**Flame of Awareness**

Enter: though  
the pearl in the pupil  
of the Eye  
into the Light  
that sees.  
That is  
the way of

thoughtlessness:  
across the freedom  
sky deep and  
serene into  
the pure  
space of  
isness;

Enter:  
through  
the blazing  
white marrow  
of the golden flame  
into the living  
presence of  
a fleeting moment,  
where every notion and  
each frame of time  
collapses in  
unbound  
flow.

This is  
the way of  
utter restfulness:  
thro the soft  
and impregnable  
absorbing darkness,  
where the Self nestles  
consuming the world,  
down into the empty  
nesting ground  
of existence;

Let the whole  
body be ablaze with  
the Flame of Awareness,  
so that the awakened one  
explodes in one’s own  
boundlessness—

from  
his seat  
of Flame in  
the Heart Rose  
of the cosmic shaft  
the Master whispers thus  
revealing the occult secrets of  
the yore, on the watch for  
souls ready to receive  
his gift and glow.

—Dhyaanavati





## Apropos

To live within, in constant aspiration towards the Divine—that renders us capable of regarding life with a smile and remaining in peace whatever the external circumstances. —The Mother

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes. —Marcel Proust

You may believe that you are responsible for what you do, but not for what you think. The truth is that you are responsible for what you think, because it is only at this level that you can exercise choice. What you do comes from what you think. —A Course in Miracles

Since you alone are responsible for your thoughts, only you can change them. You will want to change them when you realize that each thought creates according to its own nature. Remember that the law works at all times and that you are always demonstrating according to the kind of thoughts you habitually entertain. Therefore, start now to think only those thoughts that will bring you health and happiness. —Paramahansa Yogananda

The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, or not to anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly. —The Buddha

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness. —Dalai Lama

When you judge another, you do not define them, you define yourself. —Wayne Dyer

Everything in your life is there as a vehicle for your transformation. Use it! —Ram Dass

Make a gift of your life and lift all mankind by being kind, considerate, forgiving, and compassionate at all times, in all places, and under all conditions, with everyone as well as yourself. This is the greatest gift anyone can give. —David R. Hawkins

Realize deeply that the present moment is all you ever have. Make the Now the primary focus of your life. —Eckhart Tolle

True intelligence operates silently. Stillness is where creativity and solutions to problems are found. —Eckhart Tolle

The spiritual journey is individual, highly personal. It can't be organized or regulated. It isn't true that everyone should follow one path. Listen to your own truth. —Ram Dass

When our actions create discord in another person, we, ourselves, in this lifetime or another, will feel that discord. Likewise, if our actions create harmony and empowerment in another, we also come to feel that harmony and empowerment. —Gary Zukav

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

The only devils in this world are those running around inside our own hearts, and that is where all our battles should be fought. —Gandhi

Each person comes into this world with a specific destiny—he has something to fulfill, some message has to be delivered, some work has to be completed. You are not here accidentally—you are here meaningfully. There is a purpose behind you. The whole intends to do something through you. —Osho

As we cultivate peace and happiness in ourselves, we also nourish peace and happiness in those we love. —Thich Nhat Hanh

With unfailing kindness, your life always presents what you need to learn. Whether you stay home or work in an office or whatever, the next teacher is going to pop right up. —Charlotte Joko Beck

When you have learned how to decide with God, all decisions become as easy and as right as breathing. There is no effort, and you will be led as gently as if you were being carried down a quiet path in summer. —A Course in Miracles

Every thought, action, decision or feeling creates an eddy in the interlocking, interbalancing, ever-moving energy fields of life, leaving a permanent record for all of time. This realization can be intimidating when it first dawns on us, but it becomes a springboard for rapid evolution. —David R. Hawkins

If you could only keep quiet, clear of memories and expectations, you would be able to discern the beautiful pattern of events. It's your restlessness that causes chaos. —Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

When you demand nothing of the world, nor of God, when you want nothing, seek nothing, expect nothing, then the supreme state will come to you uninvited and unexpected. —Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are. —The Talmud

The Buddha's teachings on love are clear. It is possible to live twenty-four hours a day in a state of love. Every movement, every glance, every thought, and every word can be infused with love. —Thich Nhat Hanh

To be a committed spiritual seeker, it is necessary to relinquish the desire to be 'right' or of imaginary value to society. In fact, nobody's ego or belief systems are of any value to society at all. The world is neither good nor bad nor defective, nor is it in need of help or modification because its appearance is only a projection of one's own mind. —David R. Hawkins