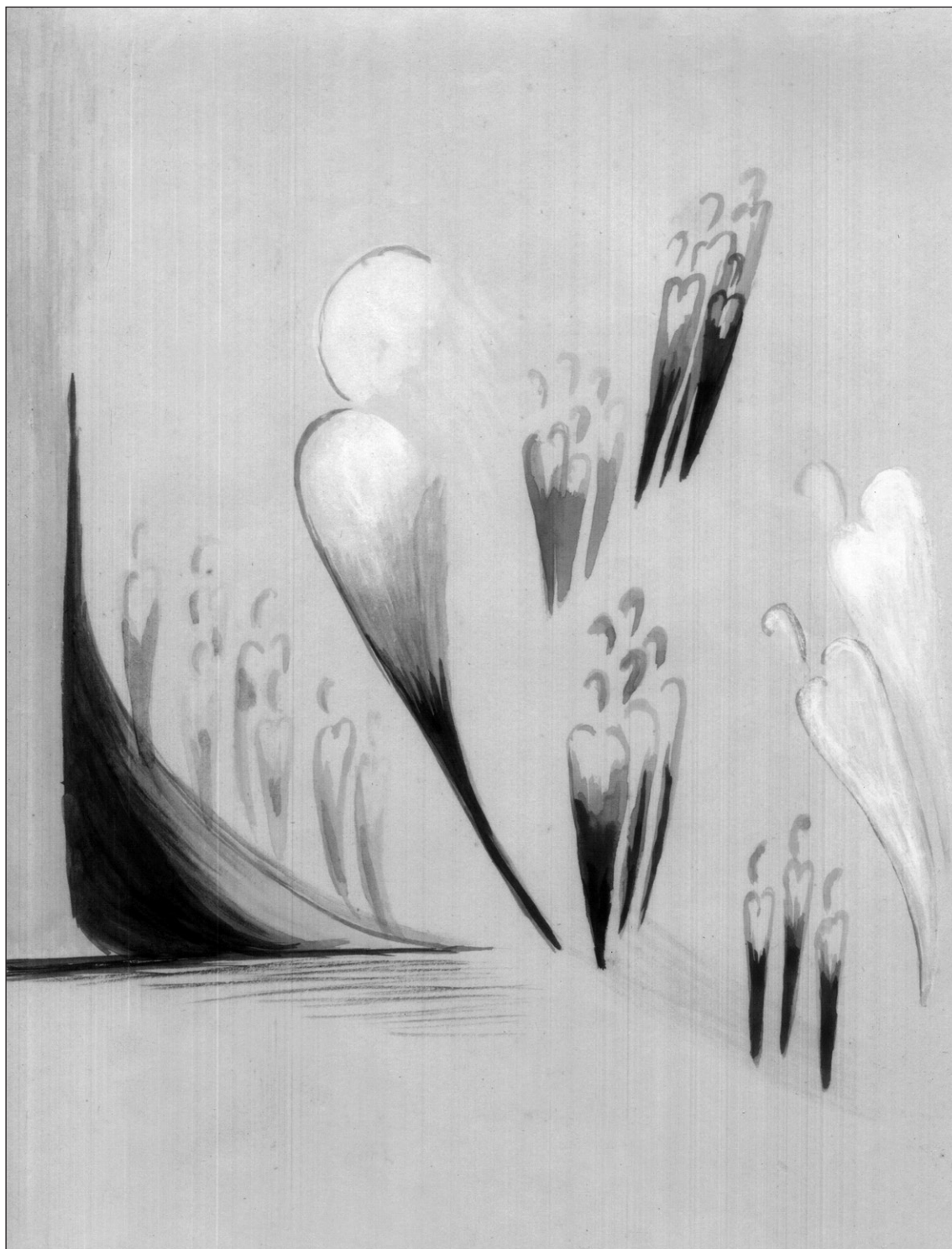


Collaboration

Winter 2012

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 37, No. 3



Michael Miovic: The seven jewel centers of the Earth Mother •
John Robert Cornell: Visionary eyes on America •
Current affairs • AV almanac • Source material • Poetry • Apropos



About the cover

Title: The supramental boat: Ascent to Truth (2). This is a greyscale reproduction of a color painting (pencils with watercolor) by Mirajyoti (mjyoti@auroville.org.in) who has lived in Auroville since 1989 and formerly lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It is part of a collection in soft pastels which has been set to music on a DVD which is available from the artist. Mirajyoti is also an editor and she coedited the popular book *The Hierarchy of Minds* with Prem Sobel, among other works.

The authors and poets

Alan (alan@auroville.org.in) is a British Aurovilian who in 1988 helped initiate Auroville's monthly news magazine Auroville Today, and since then has been one of its chief editors.

Maya Angelou (b. 1928) is an American author and poet. She has been awarded over 30 honorary degrees and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for her 1971 volume of poetry, *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diie*.

John Robert Cornell (john.robt@gmail.com) is a writer in Northern California with an abiding interest in the Integral Yoga and the American yoga. He is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Association that publishes Collaboration.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was born in Amherst, Massachusetts and lived a mostly introverted and reclusive life. Although she was a prolific private poet, fewer than a dozen of her nearly 1800 poems were published during her lifetime.

Robert Frost (1874-1963) is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech. His work frequently employed settings from rural life to examine complex social and philosophical themes.

Mandakini Gupta is a newcomer Aurovilian who is on the editorial staff of Auroville Today. She may be reached at: mandakinigupta.a@gmail.com.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was born in Portland, Maine. He predominantly wrote lyric poems which are known for their musicality and which often presented stories of mythology and legend.

Michael Miovic (mmiovic@yahoo.com) is a psychiatrist currently living in Minnesota. For more on the topic of jewel centers, see the author's article at www.integralyoga-auroville.com/Insights.php.

Navarre Scott Momaday (b. 1934) is a Kiowa-Cherokee writer from Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969 for his novel *House Made of Dawn*.

Larry Seidlitz (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is currently residing in Auroville, and works as an editor for Collaboration, Auroville Today, as well as freelance on books related to the Integral Yoga.

Walt Whitman (1818-1892) was an American poet, essayist and journalist. He was a part of the transition between transcendentalism and realism. He is often called the father of free verse.

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From the office of Collaboration

In this issue we feature two essays which are related to the theme of the upcoming All USA Meeting (AUM) that will be held starting June 20 in Ashland, OR, "Discovering the soul of America: A step in Human Unity." Information regarding this meeting is included in the first section of this issue, Current Affairs, along with another piece on new study guides that are available from the Institute for Wholistic Education.

The first of our featured essays is by Michael Miovic. While also discussing the soul of America, this essay is broader in scope and examines a general theory that Michael has advanced regarding the soul qualities of nations around the world. He has based his theory in part on a passage by Sri Aurobindo which is reproduced alongside the essay. In brief, the theory suggests that there is a general pattern of the soul qualities of the nations based on their geographical location which can be mapped to the system of chakras or energy centers that is familiar to many systems of yoga. He calls these the jewel centers of the Earth Mother, based on the passage from Sri Aurobindo. He discusses the energies associated with many countries, and considers evidence for his hypotheses regarding the specific qualities of particular nations based on their physical and cultural features. While some aspects of this theory were examined in an earlier *Collaboration* article which focused on the soul qualities of America, this one has substantial new material.

The second essay is a long one by John Robert Cornell that specifically examines the soul qualities of America. John Robert has been considering this subject for many years and *Collaboration* has published previous articles by him on the subject, but again, this one has much new material and a different focus. Whereas some of John Robert's earlier work has focused on the American landscape and its relation to the American soul, this essay presents a more sweeping analysis ranging from the basis of the theory of the nation soul and the nature of America's positive and negative qualities as reflected in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings, to various social, economic, and political developments that are expressive of them. There is also an interesting discussion of America's true role in the world and its spiritual destiny, which seems to be closely linked with India's. The essay is well-researched, and provides an in-depth introduction to the topic for the participants of the upcoming AUM.

Our section of Source Material also pertains to the theme of the soul qualities of nations and of America in particular. We include Sri Aurobindo's "A message to America" which he wrote in 1949, as well as another letter bearing on the qualities of America and other Allies in the second world war. These two pieces give some background and complementary perspectives on our featured essays. We also include a collection of passages by the Mother that pertain to the soul qualities of various nations.

In our AV Almanac section we have two articles. The first is by Mandakini Gupta and focuses on the relation between students of the Ashram's Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education and Auroville. For many years, this relation has been kept distant by the administrators of the Ashram school, especially its Physical Education Department. Mandakini was herself born in Auroville, then became a student of the Ashram school, and now has returned to Auroville to live. She interviews a number of ex-students from the school who either live in Auroville or have relations with it, and considers whether it is time to put the past behind and open up new avenues of exchange. The second article is by Alan and it examines the looming water crisis that Auroville will likely face in the near future due to the intrusion of sea water into the ground water used for drinking. It specifically looks at the plans and steps that are being made to address the problem.

We close the issue with poems from Sri Aurobindo and six great American poets, the latter of which also provide a window into America's soul, and in our *Apropos* section, with an inspiring collection of quotations.

Collaboration patrons needed

To meet its expenses, *Collaboration* is in need of more patron subscribers who could contribute \$50 or more annually. We also ask current subscribers to consider making a gift subscription in behalf of others who may enjoy the journal. We are trying to expand the number of subscribers, and ask for your assistance and support.

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Submissions: *Collaboration* welcomes writing, photos, and artwork relevant to the Integral Yoga and spirituality. Submit material by email to: editor@collaboration.org; or by post to *Collaboration*, 2715 W. Kettleman Lane, Suite 203-174, Lodi, CA 95242 USA. *Collaboration* cannot be held responsible for loss or damage of unsolicited material. Letters and articles may be edited for style and space considerations.

About SAA: The Sri Aurobindo Association distributes information about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and Auroville, and supports projects related to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, and Integral Yoga activities in America. Current members: Lynda Lester, president; John Robert Cornell, secretary; Kalpana Patel, treasurer; and Margaret Phanes. *Collaboration* Associates include Lucie Seidlitz and Vishnu Eschner.

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

AUM 2013 Announcement

AUM 2013 will be held in Ashland, OR, from June 20 to 23 on the theme “Discovering the Soul of America: A Step in Human Unity.”

The fierce urgency of global need and “the demand of the Time-Spirit on the human race that it find subjectively, not only in the individual, but in the nation and in the unity of the human race, its real self” are the inspirations for this conference/experience of the national soul-being of the United States.

In our time of global economic barbarism, fractured politics, climate disruption, and environmental destruction, Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s words light up an aspiration to widen consciousness, to collective yoga.

“The unity of all the nations is the compelling future of the world. But for the unity of all nations to be possible, each nation must first realise its own unity,” Mother wrote. Sri Aurobindo told us that the modern nation, “like the individual, essentially is a soul rather than has one.” It is a power of the divine to broaden the human consciousness toward a real human unity. And “it is the first duty and need of every man to keep alive, to defend or to struggle for release and rehabilitation” “not only the sacredness of the physical mother, the land, but also, the nation as a collective soul.”

We all have to do this work, Sri Aurobindo wrote in *The Human Cycle*. This work of discovering the shining collective soul of our country as well as bringing new light to the dark shadow side of America, is our yoga, too. The conference welcomes all Integral Yoga sadhaks and others who are inspired to engage and offer this work.

The conference will be a single, integrated experience, based on the nation soul workshops pioneered by Soleil and Wolfgang. Presenters at this writing, beside Soleil and Wolfgang, include Michael Miovic (Integral Yoga author), Ashesh Joshi (Integral Yoga teacher, Auroville); Woman Stands Shining (Navajo writer and artist); David West (Professor of Native American History); Jill Navarre (theater director, Auroville); Bryan Walton, and Julian Lines (Auroville International USA and International Advisory Council); and Gaia Lamb (Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham).

The location is a retreat and healing center which has hosted ceremonies to heal past disputes and bring a new integrated harmony between native peoples and other local residents. Prominent nature sanctuaries within an hour or two include Mt. Shasta and Crater Lake. In addition to deep personal and collective work on the nation soul, this conference will have a special focus on re-integrating the contributions of Native peoples to the nation’s soul. It will also feature a dedicated children’s program related to the conference theme.

The website www.collaboration.org/aum/2013/ has just been

posted with first details on this special gathering. More complete information will follow. AUM prices will be very reasonable, including accommodations in a nearby hotel and in tipis and tents onsite. Registration forms will be online beginning January 31st. Scholarships will be available.

Dear friends, we would love to see you at this gathering!
—The AUM Team: Soleil, John Robert, Wolfgang and Karen.

Institute for Wholistic Education

The Institute, in collaboration with Lotus Press (www.lotuspress.com) is publishing a series of detailed study guides to Sri Aurobindo’s major works. We began the work on these study guides over three years ago. Published this month are three volumes of *Readings in Sri Aurobindo’s The Life Divine* (vols. 1–3) covering respectively Book 1, chapters 1–28, Book 2, chapters 1–14, and Book 3, chapters 15–28. Here is a brief description:

Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga has enormous implications for the time we find ourselves in. As we systematically destroy the basis of life on the planet, and wall off one another through ultimate fragmentation, we are left with the stark contrast of choosing between survival and destruction, life and death, growth or decline. Sri Aurobindo recognizes the necessity of the individual within the context of the collectivity, universality and the transcendent consciousness of Oneness. The individual is the nexus or hub of the evolutionary urge, but not separate from or at the expense of the life of the cosmic whole. Sri Aurobindo’s message is one of ultimate optimism. The contradictions we see around us, the harsh conflicts and destructive actions are part of a transitional phase through which life on this planet is evolving. In the end, the deeper meaning of life provides us with both a hope and a certainty that we can survive these times and bring about transformations far more powerful than those that saw life come to the material world, or mind come into life. The *Readings* explore the themes and issues raised in *The Life Divine* on a chapter by chapter basis. The vast scope of *The Life Divine* is made accessible in the short essays that illuminate each theme. They can act as a systematic study guide, or as a means to quickly locate topics of specific interest.

Appearing in December 2012 will be *Readings in The Mother by Sri Aurobindo*, the next book in the series. We are also in the midst of preparing another study guide on Rebirth and Karma which is expected to be ready by Summer 2013.

As a special offer to Sri Aurobindo study centers located in the USA, we are offering one free set to each center that requests one from us for your library and potential use as a study guide.

Kindle versions are being made available through Amazon for those who use either a Kindle Reader or Kindle APP on any other platform. The books are also available on Google Books (epub) format for those who use Nook or other epub based readers.

Contact Santosh at santoshk@msn.com; 3425 Patzke Lane, Racine, WI 53405; or visit the website: www.wholisticinstitute.org



AV almanac

The Ashram students and Auroville

by Mandakini Gupta

Mandakini, an ex-student from Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE), Pondicherry, has experienced at first hand certain 'divides' between Auroville and SAICE and its Physical Education Department (PED). She delves deeper into the matter and wonders if the time hasn't come to heal the divide. Reprinted from Auroville Today, December 2012.

Born in Auroville to Aurovilian parents, I lived in Promesse for the first two years of my life. My elder sister, though being an Aurovilian child, was accepted as a student of the SAICE, as was my elder brother. In my case, I was not an Aurovilian anymore by the time I was accepted in the SAICE as my parents had meanwhile moved to Pondicherry. It was the early 1980s, a little after the Government of India has promulgated the Auroville Emergency Provision Act to end the problems between Auroville and Sri Aurobindo Society, and a deep divide had been opened between the two communities. Anything to do with Auroville was a big question mark for the SAICE, and in particular, for its PED.

The SAICE students were asked not to visit Auroville. If they were found engaging with the youth or students of Auroville they would be removed from the school. It was explained that the youth and children in Auroville could be a bad influence and that this prohibition was laid down in order to protect them. The students were also asked not to go to restaurants in Pondicherry or watch movies in the cinemas.

As a student, I respected this. To make it easier for us, the SAICE provided us with various recreational activities such as Saturday movies on the big screen in the Play-Ground, picnics and get-togethers; night-outs by the lake and celebrations. The SAICE also agreed that we were allowed to visit Ashram restaurants and guided and provided us with alternative avenues for the restrictions they expected us to follow. I soon let go of my keenness to explore deeper into the causes of the divide.

Today, however, almost three decades later, after I found my way back to Auroville and became part of the experiment, I am brought afresh, face to face with that divide that prohibits me from entering PED premises like the Sports-Ground and the Play-Ground, just like all other SAICE ex-students living in Auroville, implying to me that Auroville is still seen, perhaps, as contagious.

But is this a 'real' difficulty, or are the habits of the past still being continued? Aurosree, an ex-student of the SAICE who has been visiting Auroville for the past 14 years, remembers the

restrictions placed upon the students regarding interacting with the Auroville youth. At the time, he thought they were 'purely political'. Now, he is not so sure. "From a certain point of view I resonated with the rules set for the students. There was a lack of discipline in most Auroville students and this may negatively influence the upbringing of the Ashram students if they were allowed to mingle with them."

Srimoyi, another ex-student living in Auroville since 27 years, agrees. "These restrictions were valid from the perspective of implementing protection measures. In Auroville, an abundance of unchecked and unmonitored freedom and license was and is available to the youth. Therefore stopping the Ashram children from engaging with the Auroville youth was understandably a protective measure, although one can argue about how it is being done."

However, Srimoyi notes that "While there were restrictions imposed on the SAICE students, some of us were never actually prohibited from visiting Auroville." In fact, she remembers in the mid and late 70's cycling to Auroville very early on Sunday mornings for a picnic or to visit a community. "In those days, we visited Utility and Aspiration very frequently. There were group midnight cycle outings into the Utility canyons and Aurobeach where we lit a fire and had great fun. I also remember coming to do the all night concreting of the Matrimandir. It was another era, another age."

Aurosree also remembers that "In spite of the rule I always visited Auroville and no one from the authorities objected. In fact, Pranab-da (the head of the PED which enforced the restrictions) allowed some of us to come to Auroville." At the same time, Aurosree acknowledges that there was a cost. "The general restriction against coming to Auroville curbed the Ashram students from getting exposed to the vast knowledge and culture of the outside world."

Shashwat, an ex-student of the SAICE who now teaches there, points out that, "The world around the Ashram and Pondicherry has changed dramatically in the past few years. There are far greater challenges facing our school and its children than those that arise from interactions with children from Auroville. Many more students today interact with children from other schools in Pondicherry, and there are new avenues of interactions emerging from social platforms like Facebook. To be honest, I doubt if restricting one form of interaction while turning a blind eye to the others is really a matter of policy. I think it is rather inertia, having certain rules in place that are outdated and should be modified as both communities move forward."

What should be done?

"What should be set aside," says Srimoyi, "are the prejudices and impressions, stemming from events in the past, that some authorities and Aurovilians still hold against each other. A new and fresher understanding can be established if more exchanges or mixing between the two communities could take place." Shashwat says, "I think some form of collaboration at the school level would be incredible. The New Creation Choir, for



example, which came and performed for us here, was stunning. Getting teachers from both communities to attend or conduct workshops would be fantastic. Even sharing the challenges both communities face in bringing up children would give all of us insights in how to be prepared for the onslaught of changes that are beginning to take place around us.”

Actually, there are already many interchanges happening between adult Ashramites and Aurovilians. Shashwat notes, “There aren’t any restrictions imposed on adults in the Ashram in interacting with Auroville and its members. I personally have worked very closely with Didier and Kumbha at SoundWizard, Ricardo from New Dawn Carpentry, Palani at Aureka and they have all been incredible people to work with. The studio we built in Delafon (the SAICE building for children between 6–9 years) would not have been possible without their expertise and help. Manoj-da (the Managing Trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram) has always been very supportive and encouraging the collaboration with Auroville. Also, the solar power project in the SAICE is being taken up by people in Auroville.”

Nancy, who lived and worked in Auroville in the early days and now teaches in the SAICE reflects, “If one of the purposes of the division was to be able to keep them separate in order to help them develop in their own way, I think that time is coming to a close. Auroville has certainly developed its own identity and the Ashram children are now connected to so much of the world that at this point in time the division seems purely out of habit. There are no strong feelings against each other. So it would now seem beneficial to come to know each other more. There are so many wonderful people doing such sincere work in both places. We in the Ashram could really learn and develop from the contact with Aurovilians who are sincerely seeking to do the Mother’s work in ways which are sometimes different but often similar to our own in the Ashram.” Auroree agrees, “I believe the SAICE has outgrown those issues towards Auroville and is far more compassionate today than before. There is a growing understanding between the two communities.” Shashwat recalls a conversation with Pranab da and shares, “He (Pranab-da) also said that the day the reasons behind these prohibitions were no longer valid, he would be the first to open his arms to Auroville.”

He continues, “Both institutions were created by The Mother and, I am sure, both will some day grow to serve their true purpose in human history.”

This note is echoed by considerable number of individuals who are or have been part of Ashram or Auroville or both. They all have a common, innate aspiration that both entities reciprocate more, open up to interactions between their members and encourage increased collaboration between the schools of Ashram and Auroville and, amongst other possibilities, welcome ex-SAICE students living in Auroville and the Aurovilians to all the SAICE and PED premises, and so nurture the Oneness which underlies their apparent differences. The aspiration and efforts to bridge the divide are ardent and active, the time has come. With unflinching faith I wait for its manifestation.

Auroville is facing a water crisis

From an interview with Alan

Toby, former director of Hydron Flevoland, later Vitens, a public water company supplying drinking water in the province of Flevoland, The Netherlands, is now executive of the Auroville Water Service. Here he talks about the present and future water supply system in Auroville and the critical water situation facing Auroville and the bioregion. Reprinted from Auroville Today, December 2012.

Auroville Today: Ditches are appearing in many parts of the city and huge lengths of black pipeline are lying along the roadsides. What is going on?

We are replacing old PVC pipes which are leaking badly. In the Residential Zone we are losing 40% to 50% of the water through cracked or leaking pipes. Their lifetime is over, and we are replacing them with high definition polyethylene pipes (HDPE) which are very strong and can last 80 years. My experience of using these pipes in Holland is that the losses are only about 0.2%, even after many years.

At the same time, because these new pipes last so long, we have started preparing the water infrastructure for the future city. We are still discussing where exactly all the pipes should go, but the main lines of the new infrastructure are clear. Starting in the Residential Zone, we are putting in a pipe along the Crown Road: this ring will be the backbone of the future system.

What about storage? Will you have to create more storage tanks?

We have two possibilities. Either we create a pressurized system and then we don’t need tanks, or we construct a new water tank that would be sufficient to supply the needs of half or more of the population of Auroville.

The main discussion going on at present concerns whether we should have a decentralized or a centralized water system in the city. At present, we don’t have a decentralized system, we have a fragmented one. There are about 150 water systems serving different communities and these systems vary tremendously in terms of capacity and quality. Some people pay a lot for getting poor water and others pay nothing for getting good water. In the long run, this is not viable. We must standardize as much as possible the quality and ensure that everybody has the same access to good quality water.

The next step we envisage is to connect some of those systems together into local systems so that gradually more systems interconnect with each other. This has already happened with the communities which share the big water tank near Invocation. In the end, I think the whole city system should be totally interconnected to ensure that the water supply – the wells, pipes, pumps and storage—is optimized.



Let's look at the larger water situation. Do we have enough to support a future township of 50,000? In fact, do we have water security even today?

In many ways, we are blessed here. We have a lot of rain, about double what falls on my country, although here it falls only between 30 and 60 days a year. We also have a number of aquifers which are fantastic reservoirs for the rainwater. Then again, we have the technology here to convert wastewater into usable water. So, all in all, if you look at our resources they are quite fantastic.

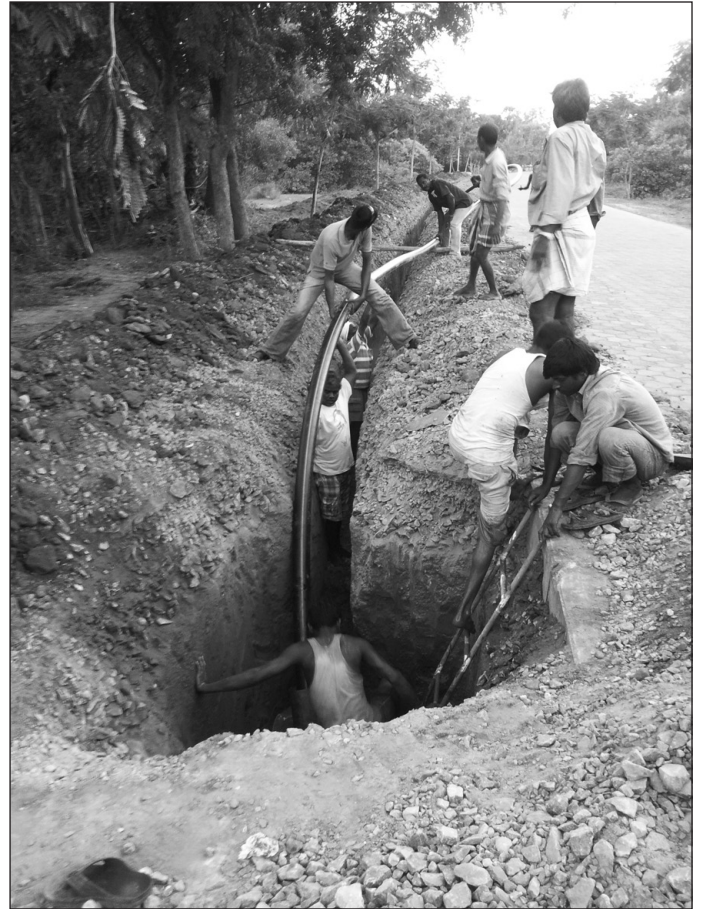
Nevertheless, the situation has become critical in regard to drinking water as we cannot isolate Auroville from the rest of the bioregion with which we share the aquifers. And here things are going badly wrong. The Government of Tamil Nadu provides free electricity to farmers, who have installed huge water pumps, often without switches, which run whenever there is current. Consequently, they pump out much more water from the aquifers than the natural recharge. As a result, over the last 30–40 years the people of this bioregion have managed to exhaust almost all of the groundwater resources. But that's not the end of it. The main aquifer is below sea level. This means that when the pressure in the aquifers drops too much due to the gap between extraction and recharge, seawater will intrude and our groundwater system, which is our main source of water at present, will become salinated.

Nobody knows exactly when it will happen. It may take two years or four years or ten, but it has already happened in many places in southern Tamil Nadu under similar circumstances and it is likely to happen here too. We are in a dangerous situation. And once it starts happening, not only is it irreversible but it also goes fast. The experts predict that it would take only three to six months for the whole system to become salinated. That will put Auroville in an impossible situation as we can't reorient a whole water system in just six months. For this reason, some of us have been urgently looking at alternatives. Moreover, when I'm putting in these expensive pipes that will last for 80 years I want to know for sure that I have a resource that I can completely rely upon for that period, a resource that will provide for all our water needs.

What are the alternatives?

At present, our possible sources are rainwater, groundwater, treated wastewater and desalinated seawater, but there is a question mark over the continued availability of groundwater. All of these sources can make a contribution—and I like it that we are simultaneously developing rainwater and wastewater and desalinated water as possible scenarios—but to have three or four or five different water supply systems for the numbers of people who are here is crazy. We have to have a main line, a principal source.

We are still discussing what this could be. While the matter is undoubtedly urgent, I regret that sometimes in Auroville we choose too quickly on the basis of our likes and dislikes. We judge



Workers laying High Definition Polyethylene pipes along the Crown road (Photo courtesy Auroville Today)

too quickly, without looking at the total picture—the available resources, our present and future needs and how we can bring the two together, both technically and economically.

For example, each system requires a different set up and has its advantages and disadvantages. We have a lot of rainwater here, and I fully support those people who want to maximise our capacity to harvest it. But the disadvantage of rainwater is that you are never sure how much you will get, and most of it falls in a limited period so you need a lot of storage. My focus is on desalination. I envisage desalinated water being pumped up from the beach, stored in a big tank somewhere in Auroville and being distributed from there. But desalination also has its advantages and disadvantages.

The advantage of desalination in terms of it depending upon an abundant resource is obvious. However, there are questions regarding the pollution of the seawater and the high energy costs involved.

The desalination plant at Minjur north of Chennai has been operating for about two years and it seems to be operating well,



but I don't know how they have dealt with the problem of dispersing the brine which is accumulated in the process. I've read the reports that gave permission to construct this plant and I was very surprised they said that the accumulation of brine would only have a marginal effect on the environment. The Ministry of Environment and Forest, which has to give permission for the setting up of desalination plants, is now scrutinizing the consequences for the environment of each proposed plant.

At the same time, over the past 20 years the amount of chemicals needed in the process, and which also accumulate in the brine, has been much reduced. The same is true of the power consumption. The old desalination plants used about 4 kW of electricity per thousand litres desalinated, and that has now gone down to about 2.2 kW. In fact, desalination is now roughly comparable to other water treatment systems in terms of power consumption and environmental impact. And if the electricity can be generated in an environmentally-friendly way, desalination becomes even more attractive. However, the cost per 1,000 litres is still high.

What part would the projected Matrimandir lake play in these different water scenarios?

Those who favour harvesting rainwater or treating wastewater see the projected lake around Matrimandir as one of the main storage areas. Personally, I don't believe that you need a lake to have a drinking water system, but as the lake will be there we should see how we can use it optimally.

Unfortunately, the whole Matrimandir lake discussion is very polarized at present. Questions abound. To fill the lake, should we use rainwater or desalinated water or a combination of both? Should the lake be part of the drinking water system or merely aesthetic? Should the level of the lake be allowed to rise and fall? Is there an occult dimension to water in proximity to the Matrimandir and, if so, how does that affect our planning? I think we should experiment with different scenarios, but before we do so we should sit together and decide how the whole system will connect together. This is the information, the thinking, which is not sufficiently there at present.

If the aquifers become saline it will affect the whole bioregion, which means hundreds of thousands of people. Will Auroville be able to provide itself with water without including these people?

If the groundwater in the bioregion turns saline it is the government which is responsible for providing the inhabitants with drinking water. But Auroville can help in developing solutions for a situation like this and, if we have sufficient resources, we can also share.

What about the demand side? Do you see the need to educate people to use water more wisely?

Absolutely, we have to change the way people use such a precious resource. Actually, from a water management point of view, the ideal is to deliver as little water as possible, not as much as possible. It's not well known that water organizations are one of the most environmentally-conscious organizations because they not only provide water but also have to see that that water is used in the right way. In Europe the average total water consumption is about 140 litres per person per day whereas in Auroville we are using 250 litres and, in some cases, 450 litres per person per day (although the system losses are high at present). This is not sustainable. I don't know the figures for the rest of India, but 50% of the people in Tamil Nadu are involved in farming and as they get free electricity to pump water their usage is probably high. The biggest lever of change would be if the electricity company would start charging the farmers for the electricity they use—but this is unlikely to happen as this would result in a massive loss of votes for the political party which imposes this measure. But there are many things we can do in Auroville to reduce the water that we use. We should choose the right technology—the most efficient pumps, washing-machines, shower heads, taps etc. Secondly, there is the educational aspect. We need to keep telling people not to water their gardens in the middle of the day and to immediately mend or replace leaking taps and valves. People should also plant species which are drought-resistant. Thirdly, we have to meter the water and charge people for the water that they use. When we started doing this in certain communities in the Residential Zone, we noted an immediate effect: the usage went down by 25%. In future, in an interconnected system in the city everything would be metered and the tariff would be the same for everyone.

Isn't the human element a much bigger challenge in Auroville than in Holland when it comes to developing new water systems and convincing people to use water intelligently? There, for example, you have the benefit of legislation and a social agreement that everybody cooperates in ensuring water security.

Yes. The country where I come from has a long history in terms of the development of its water supply. Every year there's a substantial investment in maintaining and developing the supply while, by law, everybody has a right of access to water and you're not allowed to pay more than a certain rate. Here in Auroville many people have paid for their entire water system—the pump, pipelines, and in some cases the windmill or a generator—out of their own pockets, and this sometimes leads to problems, like people prioritizing it for their own use or, in the past, even refusing to provide water to somebody they don't like. This is why there is an urgent need for depersonalization of assets like this. Otherwise we face difficulties which are hard to overcome.



Essays

The seven jewel centers of the Earth Mother

by Michael Miovic

In a densely suggestive description of the Supreme Mahashakti, in the *Record of Yoga* [see box at right], Sri Aurobindo notes that just as there are seven chakras in the subtle body of the human being, there are likewise seven “jewel centers” associated with the planetary body of Mother Earth. Presumably, these energy centers of the Earth canalize the major planes of consciousness into material substance, just as the chakras connect the human consciousness to these planes. However, Sri Aurobindo never elaborated further on the seven jewel centers, so it is left to us to characterize them more completely. The interpretation of the jewel centers offered here is based on my own experience and inference, and therefore could be wrong in part or in whole.

The hypothesis developed here is that the seven jewel centers correspond roughly to the seven continents, and that these jewel centers serve the same general functions with respect to the consciousness of the earth as the chakras of classical Indian yoga serve with respect to the consciousness of the human being. That is, each of the jewel centers opens to and canalizes the expression of a major plane of consciousness in matter, and this can be perceived inwardly as the subtle atmosphere of the land of each place, much as one can inwardly see the aura of human beings.

However, because the chakras in the human instrument open to and express the various planes of consciousness primarily on the Life plane, their influence is less directly palpable in the physical vehicle than are the influences of the jewel centers, which open to and express the planes of consciousness in physical substance proper. Also, as the Earth Mother



is immense and ancient in comparison to the human being, the consciousness of the jewel centers is impressively strong and stable, once one begins to perceive it. As best as I have been able to determine to date, this spiritual force or consciousness is principally associated with the bedrock of each place, and seems muted around large bodies of water, especially seas and oceans, which may act as buffer or transition zones between the jewel centers. What the consciousness of sea floors may be is a good question, for which I have no reply as yet but would welcome insights from interested observers.

In any case, the following study represents an initial attempt to map out the geo-spiritual organization of the planet Earth, paying special attention to how various human cultures have grown to express the consciousness of the jewel center where they developed. Evidently, as an experiment in a new way of understanding the world, some of the reflections here will later be found to need revision, enlargement, or reformulation in the light of a higher perception. The first step in this corrective process would be to document a large number of reported spiritual experiences of the lands of the planet, and this in turn will require the development of a new branch of collective yoga involving the efforts of many souls over time and space. My own observations reported here must therefore be taken as indicative at best, not definitive, as this direct experience is limited mostly to parts of North and Central America, Europe, and India, and even within these regions is not complete.

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

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

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

The seven Lotus-es are the seven cakras of the Tantric tradition, descending and ascending from Mind (Sahasradala, Ajna, Visuddha, Anahata) that take up Life through Life in Force (Manipura, Swadhisthana) down to Life involved in Matter (Muladhara).

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

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

To liberate all these powers by the luminous and flaming descent of the Suns of the Supermind and the release of the eighth Sun of Truth hidden in the Earth, in the darkness of the Inconscience, in the cavern of Vala and his Panis, this is the first step towards the restoration of the Earth Mother to her own divinity and the earth-existence to its native light, truth, life and bliss of immaculate Ananda. (*Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 10-11, pp. 1339-1340)



Also, it is important to remember that all of the human cultural phenomena described in association with the jewel centers are ultimately secondary data, or a medium for studying jewel center effects. The essential primary data is direct spiritual experience of the land, which compasses a complex range of inner and outer perceptions that are impossible to put into words adequately. To arrive at such an experiential understanding of the jewel centers, each soul must enter into and cultivate his or her own personal communion with the Earth Mother, and from that will flow later a new collective yoga.

There are, of course, antecedents and congeners to the geo-spiritual theory developed here. Virtually every traditional society has in some way recognized the sanctity of the Earth Mother and the fact that she is a conscious being, and most of the world's great religious traditions have at least a few rituals or scriptural passages that acknowledge this profound truth. More recently, the development of the environmental movement and the Gaia hypothesis have tended to create, at least among some, a feeling of spirituality with regards to the Earth. There are also both Asian and Western healing traditions that have studied, to some degree, the "energy" or consciousness of the earth.

The geo-spiritual theory developed here contradicts none of these antecedents, and embraces the seed truths contained in each and all of them, but elaborates the geo-spiritual perspective on a much larger scale, as well as with more functional detail, and was arrived at independently through the extension of Sri Aurobindo's method of Integral Yoga to the world-being. Thus, the uniqueness of this perspective lies in what is new about Sri Aurobindo's vision, namely, the perception that the evolution of consciousness on Earth is the cause, not the consequence, of the physical evolution heretofore studied by science, and the clear statement of a supramental evolution beyond the human being as the next step of terrestrial evolution.

Table 1. The Seven Jewel Centres of the Earth (proposed geo-spiritual correlations)

Chakra	Jewel Center	Plane of Consciousness
1. Sahasradala - [Chaitya Purusha]	Maha-Asia Maha-Bharat, India	Higher mind (intuition) [Soul, Superconscious, the Infinite]
2. Ajna	Maha-Europa	Mental (reason, ideas, will)
3. Visuddha	Maha-Asiatica minoris	Dynamic mind (power, action)
4. Anahata	Maha-Africa	Higher vital (heart, emotion)
5. Manipura	Maha-Pacifica (middle)	Central vital (major life motives)
6. Svadisthana	Maha-Pacifica (south)	Lower vital (creative energies)
7. Muladhara - [Subconscious] - [Inconscious]	Maha-America Maha-Australia Maha-Antarctica	Physical proper (matter) Subconscious memory and habits Existential void or darkness

A geo-spiritual mapping of the planet

With those provisos, let us now turn our attention to mapping the geo-spiritual organization of the planet Earth. First and foremost, it must be said that what we call "planet Earth" is in fact only the physical manifestation of the great Earth Mother, not the all of her. In her highest, spiritual reality the Earth Mother is a large and living soul, a portion of the Supreme Goddess that has come down into the material universe to be a focal point for the evolution of consciousness midst the vast material cosmos. This soul of the Earth Mother can be experienced inwardly anywhere on the planet, but is especially apprehensible in the subtle atmosphere of the Indian subcontinent, where all of the planes of consciousness and parts of the being stand disclosed or revealed in their inmost spiritual reality, including the subtle godheads of all the jewel centers which are manifested more completely and outwardly in the other parts of the world.

Overall, the seven jewel centers of the Earth Mother correspond to the seven continents. However, as the scientific definition of continents is complex and Integral Yoga describes planes and parts of the being in addition to the seven chakras, there are important nuances to consider in a full geo-spiritual mapping of the planet.

What we may call the spiritual anatomy of the world is summarized in Table 1.

In reviewing this, you will note that in addition to the seven major chakras, there are special designations for the Indian subcontinent, Australia, and Antarctica. These correspond, respectively, to the Soul and Transcendent, the Subconscious, and the Inconscious. Also, the North Pole represents the top of the "head" for the planet, while the South Pole represents the "feet". In between the two poles, the consciousness descends from the mental planes in the northern hemisphere, through the vital planes around the equator, to the physical and then subconscious in the southern hemisphere. This vertical gradation of consciousness corresponds closely with the location of the chakras in the human being, and should be intuitively obvious.

What is less obvious, though, is how the inner versus outer dimension of the human consciousness maps to the globe. My sense is that the eastern hemisphere represents the inner being, while the western hemisphere represents the outer being. Combining these two interacting patterns of correspondence, vertical (by latitude) and horizontal (by longitude), we find the intuitive, mental and vital planes of consciousness located in the eastern hemisphere (which starts with the inner parts of the inner being along the international date line in the Pacific Ocean), while the physical consciousness and outer being are located in the Americas. The Indian subcontinent (which includes more than just the current political entity of India) subtends an opening to the Soul in the



largest sense, which includes the psychic being, Atman or transcendent Self, and the all-pervading Infinite. Australia subtends an inflection of consciousness into the Subconscious, but there are important details about the lands of the Pacific Rim in Southeast Asia, and the islands of Oceania, that I have yet to work out.

Earth imbued with conscious force

Now, the most important thing to understand about these jewel centers is that the Earth Mother is a divine Being, an evolving portion of the Supreme Mahashakti, and her lands are therefore imbued with conscious force. We shall soon see how the force-field of the land has affected the evolution of human cultures. However, before coming to that let us note that the jewel centers existed long before the human being, and have thus influenced the evolution of all life on Earth. To give convincing evidence of this proposition goes beyond the scope of this essay, but here are a few examples to suggest the point: cats are solitary animals in all parts of the world except Africa, where the an-hata influence has produced lions, which are social animals. To be social requires complex emotions, or bonds of the heart, and accordingly Africa is rich in social animals, including hyenas, meerkats, elephants, and monkeys. Africa is also the ancestral home of the most social animal of all, homo sapiens, and the continent itself is shaped like a humanoid cranium. All this points to the existence of a conscious force in the land that preceded and later influenced the evolution of higher primates into human beings.

Or take the example of elephants and cows. African elephants are large and untameable, whereas Indian elephants are both smaller and trainable, that is, more conscious. This difference in size and alacrity is due to the subtilising influence of Maha-Bharat, the spiritual center of the world. Likewise with cows: Indian cows are extremely graceful and radiate an aura of peace and beauty. They have lovely almond-shaped eyes, and soft, gentle curves in their bone structure that have al-

ways caught the eyes of artists. American cows, in contrast, are larger, more muscular, square of build, and produce prodigious volumes of milk. European cows stand somewhere between the Indian and American: the Swiss cow is smaller and more elegantly proportioned than the American, with a nice sense of definition to its form, yet is larger and stronger than the Indian cow and lacks the latter's grace and spiritual beauty. Thus, even in animals we see traits of the higher vital influence in Africa, the mental plane in Europe, the physical in America, and the spiritual in India.

When we move from animals to humans, and from cows to cars, we find that the same patterns persist. Africa does not yet have a tradition of automobile design, but America and Europe do. American cars are famously large, muscular, and consume great quantities of fuel. The American driving experience is all about the physical consciousness: one cruises comfortably across vast expanses of land, in plush seats with soft suspensions, and uses an automatic transmission that requires little mental focus to operate. The shapes of cars are either bland or boxy in a way that shows an absence of thought, and this among people who spend more time in their cars than anyone else on the planet. The European driving experience, in contrast, appeals to mental discipline in every way. Car designs reveal strong concepts and refined aesthetics, and much thought has been given to both quality and fuel efficiency. Also, the firm suspensions and manual transmissions force the mind to focus on the road, and this experience of driving a driving machine is further enhanced by the more compact landscape of Europe, which requires one to concentrate on the curves and frequent accelerations and decelerations as one winds through open country punctuated by towns and cities.

And then there is the Indian driving experience, which is entirely supra-rational. A seemingly infinite number of souls throng the streets in four wheelers, three wheelers, two wheelers, and no wheelers (i.e., on foot), and people drive in all directions simultaneously in absolute disregard

for any rules of the road whatsoever. One might call this chaos hell, but for the extraordinary fact that the death rate is so far below what the laws of statistics would predict, that one is forced to conclude the Lord exists and is showering His Grace upon the subcontinent at every minute. The whole thing is a spiritual practice, a sadhana of faith and surrender and a constant stimulus for the mind to transcend the noxious onslaught of the five senses.

Negative traits

Evidently, I have described driving in India with a touch of humor—but humor that suggests a more serious point. Jewel center forces are real, and like all real forces produce phenomena of resistance when the human consciousness is too limited to contain the massive charge of the land. Thus we find that in each place human cultures show unique negative traits that are the exact opposite of their special endowments.

For example, the United States is a powerhouse of materializing capacity, but also prone to excessive material consumption and waste, and currently shows an obstinate physical resistance to changing these mechanical habits it has developed. Europe is endowed with an exceptional ability to develop ideas and ideologies, and to organize life according to a mental plan, yet when taken to a wrong-minded extreme this produces a Hitler or a Stalin, and wars of devastating size and lethality. Africans are warm-hearted and emotionally open by nature, and this gift is sorely needed in the human family today, but a dark heart can lead to cruelty, hatred, and defiance of reason, and we see this in Africa's woes of tribal and clan conflict, petty dictators who hate and kill yet without the organized ideological power of Europe, and its disorganized political and economic development. And while India certainly has the opening to the soul and the Infinite consciousness, its urge towards transcendence has led to a neglect of matter, hence its dirt and disorder on the physical plane. Also, while the positive manifestation of the supra-rational Infi-



nite is a manifold play of creative energies, which is certainly seen in India's social complexity and cultural richness, the resistance to this force yields a sub-rational prison of the Finite—a suffocating trap of caste, tradition, greed, corruption, poverty, overpopulation, communal conflict, self-interest, and callous disregard for the value of human life that seems entirely incorrigible.

These characterizations of whole cultures, both positively and negatively, are of course generalizations and not to be taken in a mentally rigid fashion. Human nature itself is the same everywhere, no culture is better or worse than another, all cultures show a range of traits and are constantly evolving, individuals of all types exist within each culture, and by spiritual practice or Divine Grace one may rise in consciousness above the determinations of any time or place. The purpose here is simply to illus-

trate that jewel center influences can be perceived and described for each continent and culture, and to emphasize that the spiritually helpful way to use this vision is to see all peoples and places as portions of the Divine that are necessary for the fullness of the manifestation. The goal is to enlarge our mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's gifts and labors, and to further the cause of human unity by seeing the play of multiplicity as the self-expression of the divine One.

Cultural examples of geo-spiritual influence

India: opening to the Infinite and the Transcendent abundantly evident in her long history of yoga, mysticism, meditative practices, religious pluralism, and spiritual disciplines that emphasize direct, personal experience of the Divine (or Nirvana) as more important than belief or dogma. Note the vastness and richness of polymorphic monotheism, which sees the infinite Brahman as manifesting multitudi-

nously through countless gods, goddesses, beings, and other finite forms. This sensibility is also felt in Indian music, painting, sculpture, dance, and other creative arts that have a unique meditative appeal.

Northern Asia: China, Japan, Korea probably correspond to various levels of the higher mind. Note the ability for holistic and synthetic thinking, and a delicate and subtle touch in the creative arts. A meditative turn is also felt in Taoism and Buddhism from this region, but generally with less sense of a manifesting Infinite than in India. Note the intuitive subtlety of Chinese monochrome ink painting, the subtle energetic study of acupuncture meridians in medicine, and even mar-

The goal is to enlarge our mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's gifts and labors, and to further the cause of human unity by seeing the play of multiplicity as the self-expression of the divine One.

tial arts that emphasize meditation, balance, speed, and deft skills over the sheer strength of European boxing or wrestling. Likewise compare the asymmetrical aesthetic of Japanese gardening to the more logical, geometrical, and symmetrical taste of Versailles; or the light yet effective simplicity of chopsticks to the heavier metallic ideas of European cutlery.

Europe: a special love of logic, order, reason, geometry, symmetry, analysis, ideas and counter-ideas, all things mental is evident throughout European cultural history. From the lucid order and perfection of the Parthenon, to the well conceived structure of a Beatles pop song, in all phases of European history one meets the Mind at work under the conditions of Time spirit. We hear this in the way that classic masters such as Vivaldi or Mozart or Bach put the mind in order, see it in the visual and anatomic realism of classical European painting and sculpture, and feel it in the defined and measured grace of ballet. European history is all about big ideas played out in big ways, ideas of em-

pire (Rome and the British empire), ideas of religion (the Catholic Church and Protestant revolution), scientific ideas, industrial ideas, national ideas, political ideas, and now the idea of the EU.

Middle East: the dynamic or externalizing mind, or "throat" chakra, which throws defined ideas into powerful and effective action. From this region arose the world's first civilizations, three major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), the first written scripts, the first systems of law. Note the importance of the Word in all of these traditions and developments, and how all of the languages from this region use throaty, guttural sounds. Note also the sheer beauty of the

Arabic script, and the haunting power of the voice that calls faithful Muslims to prayer five times per day. Power dynamics are prominent in the oil trade, chronic religious conflicts in the region, terrorism, and also in

the oppression of women in some places.

Africa: the heart or high-vital influence is immediately felt in Africa's rich musical traditions. Note also that social organization here historically emphasized clans and tribes (personal relationships) over hierarchically organized empires (which are impersonal and rule-oriented), and is still very common today. Examples from animal evolution are noted in the main text. Note also how human tragedies in Africa (slavery, genocide, poverty) always have an especially heart-breaking quality.

Pacific rim and Oceania: the first life forms on Earth are thought to have evolved on the floors of the Pacific Ocean, and its waters are still the largest live-giving force on the planet. Note how the vital power, which is by nature unstable, is manifested in the tremendous volcanic activity of this region. The Pacific islands are well known for their lush beauty, and the vital force behind this physical fact has manifested in a number of ways in the various human cultures of the region, including beauti-



ful simplicity, sensuality, and brute force (among other vital qualities). In general there is a recognition of, and openness to, the forces and beings of the vital planes of consciousness, as for example in Bali where there is widespread practice of both white and black magic. The region also has numerous cultures that once practiced cannibalism, which is an inverted or perverse manifestation of the vital force, as in New Zealand, Polynesia, Sumatra, Fiji, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. While cannibalism has been documented around the world, this dense clustering of cases in the south Pacific is significant.

Americas: the focus on the physical consciousness was evidenced positively in pre-Columbian America via a profound sense of spiritual communion with Nature, and negatively through a delayed development of civilization and technology as compared to Eurasia. After European colonization, attention shifted from Nature to man-made objects, but the focus remained in the physical. Significantly, however, the sense of Nature being sacred continued with the New England transcendentalists, despite their lack of contact with Native Americans, and to this day one finds that the most authentic spirituality in the United States is nature-related, that the greatest temples of the United States are her stunning natural parks, and that the most common way north Americans “find themselves” is by going on “road trips” across the land. All of this points to the spiritual power of the American landmass.

Variations within each jewel center

Jewel centers appear to be organized in fractals, that is, the general organization of the whole planet is repeated within the organization of each jewel center. Thus, the northern part of each center corresponds to the mental planes and the southern the physical, while the eastern portion corresponds to the inner being and the western to the outer.

For example, Delhi, which lies in north India, is the cognitive command and control center of India, and has been since

the times of the Mughals. The culture here generally shows a broad-minded and cosmopolitan influence, as compared to Tamil Nadu, which lies in the south and shows clear traits of the physical consciousness, such as stability and preservation of the past. Tamil culture has always been more insular than in the north, less affected by invasions and more religiously orthodox, and the Tamil language is one of the oldest on the planet. Quite fittingly, Pondicherry became the seat for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s sadhana for the spiritual transformation of the body and of matter.

Likewise, compare Orissa and Bengal in the east, with Pakistan in the west. The eastern culture is more inward and subtle and delicate, the Orissi culture expressing the purest psychic influence, while the Bengalis have the inner visuddha power interfused with the mental. Thus, Orissa has the highest concentration of Sri Aurobindo centers on the planet, while the Bengalis show pronounced literary and artistic brilliance, coupled with spiritual sensibility and high emotional expressivity, but are better dreamers than doers. In Pakistan, on the other hand, the energies are more outwardly directed. The culture here has always been tougher than that of Bengal or Orissa, in part due to dealing with invasions by Alexander, the Kushans, and the Mughals in turn. Also, in modern times the region has been hardened by the fact and consequences of Partition, plus lately the problem of Islamic fundamentalism. Thus, Pakistan has now become almost the opposite of Bengal, a land of doers with no dream.

In Europe, it is common knowledge that northerners are more mentalised (i.e., more disciplined, rule-oriented, organized, and emotionally reserved), while southerners are more emotional, vital, sensual, and physical. Many jokes exist about these stereotypes, and on a more serious note, we see tensions now in the EU over the financially disciplined north bailing out the laxer south. However, what may be more surprising to note is that this fractal organization is repeated within each country itself. For example, northern Germans speak the “proper” German, run

the capital (Berlin), and see themselves as more progressive and sophisticated than the southern Bavarians, who are deemed more traditional (fact), a bit backward and obstinate (opinion), and are famed for their yearly ritual of Oktoberfest, the largest beer party in the world (fact). Meanwhile, according to guidebooks, the western Germans are reputed to be more fun-loving and relaxed than the rest (opinion), while the East Germans of the Soviet era lived in one the most highly regimented and repressive societies the world has ever known, where the energies were in-drawn and concentrated in a negative way (fact). The same sorts of regional variations and mutual antipathies exist within all of the other European countries, and generally follow the same geo-spiritual patterns.

In the Americas, the north-south gradation of cultural trends is obvious, and the east-west difference is also fairly clear in a wide country like the United States, where the west coast culture is known to be more “laid back” and experimental than the more disciplined and “uptight” culture of the east (especially New England).

From north to south, Canada grounds the higher mind in the physical consciousness, and accordingly Canada has the most progressive and quasi-European culture of the Americas. The United States grounds the mental planes (ajna and visuddha), and the difference between its two layers is evident in the tension between its more politically progressive but socially “cold” north, vs. its more conservative yet interpersonally affable south. Latin American culture is patently less mental and more vital than its northern neighbours, and this was reinforced historically by the English colonizing North America while Portugal and Spain took the south. But there are important gradations within Latin America: Mexico grounds the higher vital, Central America the mid vital, northern South America the lower vital, Peru and Brazil the physical proper, and southern South America grounds the subconscious in the physical. These differences are immediately felt in the music from each region, but that is a fascinating topic unto itself.



Visionary eyes on America

Sri Aurobindo and Mother on the soul qualities of the USA

by John Robert Cornell

This vast land

You don't appreciate how vast a land America is until you drive across it from coast to coast. It takes five days from California to Virginia at free-way speeds. You don't sense the intimately different qualities of wind, soil, animal community and birds until you get out and walk the land, or better, live its canyons and cities and ride its wild rivers for years, maybe lifetimes. Vegetation strange or immense, trees thorn-covered or thick as a snowstorm find community footholds in a succession of rain forest, desert, valley, mountain, prairie, alkali flat, meadow and crystal lake. Straggly bristlecone pines in western mountains here were already 2,000 years old when the Buddha was born. In the central prairie state of Kansas, one seems to ride forever across a flatness that never ends. The Rocky Mountains abruptly halt the westward-rising prairie. Ancient Appalachian shoulders in the east still stubbornly lift skyward after eons of wearing away in wind and storm. Joshua trees and saguaro cactus of the desert, the giant sequoias of the Sierra Nevada mountains, and the hardwood forests of the eastern mountains still find room to grow amid sprawling, buzzing cities and agri-farms.

The wide Mississippi rolls on south down the middle of the continent, gathering, gathering, gathering centuries of raindrops and snowflakes from its basin of 1.83 million square miles. The land itself rolls slowly towards the horizon—or falls abruptly in cliff or fault. Earthquakes twist a blacktop road into spaghetti or drop a ridge 50 vertical feet in a few seconds. And slowly, over eons, mountains rise and seas settle in, ice sheets a mile thick overlay and then wear away the rising mountains and



volcanic flows. Sahara-like sand dunes gather across ages and then compress into rainbow-hued sandstone that sprouts yellow stonecrop and ponderosa pine and a bewildering ark of insects and animals.

Scattered all across this explosion of vastness and variation, red, brown, white, black, and yellow Americans find here something of home. And call ourselves Americans. Live inside a particular story, a story with untold individual and collective variations, many strands isolated and unconnected as yet, but nonetheless leaves and branches of one in-progress story-tree.

Human unity

Sri Aurobindo and Mother, of course, also tell us a story. A larger story that includes—along with everything else—in individuals and tribes and peoples that live together in a national collective like the United States. These individuals and collectives have a special place in the larger story. The part of that story that we are concerned with here is nature's drive toward harmony. In particular, Sri Aurobindo says, nature is testing "humanity, her thinking instrument,"¹ with her ideal of human unity, which has been vaguely making its way to the forefront of Earth consciousness for more than a century. *Vaguely*, because "[n]ational egoism, the pride of domination and the desire of expansion still govern the mind of humanity, however modified they may now be in

their methods by the first weak beginnings of higher motives and a better national morality, and until this spirit is radically changed, the union of the human race by a federation of free nations must remain a noble chimera."² Nonetheless, humanity must make the attempt to realize this budding unity, he says, because "the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it..."³

Sri Aurobindo tells us of two developments coming to the surface in recent times that may help this grand ideal of unity come about. One is the emergence of a new subjective turn of consciousness in the human species that is happening in our time. The other is the appearance of the modern nation. An increasing subjectivity makes possible an effective, rich, organic, inward unity of humanity, instead of the brittle, regimented, and coerced attempts at external uniformity tried in the past. The modern nation offers a platform that could enlarge⁴ humanity's experience of unity beyond the family and tribe and town while preserving the variation and freedom that nature requires for its play of creativity and growth.

A new subjectivity

Subjectivity, in Sri Aurobindo's sense, is not the ephemeral or hallucinatory inward escape from the "real world out there" of common parlance in America. Instead it is a focus of awareness on oneself, the subject, in the attempt to discover who and what that self truly is. He says subjectivity "is in its very nature an attempt at self-knowledge and at living by a true self-knowledge and by an inner strength"...⁵ It is "a road of return to the lost knowledge"⁶ of the past, held by the ancients before the outbreak and apparent victory of the objective viewpoint in the Age of Reason. A true subjectivism teaches us, he says, "first, that we are a higher self than our ego or our members, secondly, that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others; for there is a secret solidarity which our egoism may kick at and strive against, but from which we cannot escape."⁷



He noticed that the art, music, and literature of the world were gradually moving in the “direction of an ever-deepening subjectivism.”⁸ Though this is still a fragile and tentative movement, art “and literature seem definitely to have taken a turn towards a subjective search into what may be called the hidden inside of things and away from the rational and objective canon or motive.”⁹ One practical, although partial, example of this inward turn was the realization that a child’s innate intellectual and moral capacities must be consulted and developed in child raising and education rather than being forced into the fixed mold of the ideas of parents and teachers.¹⁰

In poetry Sri Aurobindo observed a greater recognition and connection developing between the individual and the universal soul and mind.¹¹ Muriel Rukeyser, an American poet, dramatized the break away from the old objective worldview of Newtonian science and towards the emerging shoots of subjectivity in eight startling words. “The universe is made of stories, not atoms.”

Sri Aurobindo saw something more revolutionary—beyond the *mind’s* stories to accounts of the wider, richer inward being, where consciousness is more expanded in time and space and in other worlds and dimensions. “Nature is seen more in her hidden suggestions and soul meanings and in the finer impressions by which we enter into them and establish with her a spiritual relation or identity. The things that lie behind the material world are almost for the first time being touched and seen with a close and revealing intimacy... This change amounts to a revolution of the whole attitude of man towards existence...”¹² This inward turn can lead, if we do not linger overlong in our current barbaric commercialism, to humanity’s goal: “a common world-culture in which each national culture” would contribute to and receive from all the others toward “the common aim and idea of human perfection.”¹³

And he illuminated how this growing subjectivity showed itself at the time, not so much in the relations of individuals, but more in national life.

The modern nation

The emerging subjectivity is showing itself in a new form within the larger groupings of humanity: the modern nation. Sri Aurobindo wrote that the modern nation is something relatively new to the human mind—it occurred only at a small scale of brief duration in the ancient world¹⁴—and that it is not a random or accidental development. An inward need to find, develop, and express its own special meaning drives it. This new nation-collective is not the machinery of a nation’s administration or the politics or economics of its history. In other words, the nation is not the state, even though politics and economics are the stories that nearly all of our historians and political scientists tell. The nation is much more organic than the state machinery, which may or may not accompany it. It has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, and a developing mind. And, each nation has a soul or, better, *is* a soul—much as an individual is a soul—the carrier of a special meaning and power.¹⁵

In our time the subjective force that was always working behind the scenes in human collectives—through individuals, policies, changes in institutions, and so on—is now coming to the front, as nations begin to enter into possession, however crudely and imperfectly, of their subjective selves.¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo pointed to Ireland and Bengal as early examples of this emergence.

The movement of 1905 in Bengal pursued a quite new conception of the nation not merely as a country, but a soul, a psychological, almost a spiritual being and, even when acting from economical and political motives, it sought to dynamise them by this subjective conception and to make them instruments of self-expression rather than objects in themselves.... The conception to which Ireland and India have been the first to give a definite formula, “to be ourselves”—so different from the impulse and ambition of de-

pendent or unfortunate nations in the past which was rather to become like others—is now more and more a generally accepted motive of national life. It opens the way to great dangers and errors, but it is the essential condition for that which has now become the demand of the Time-Spirit on the human race, that it shall find subjectively, not only in the individual, but in the nation and in the unity of the human race itself, its deeper being, its inner law, its real self and live according to that and no longer by artificial standards.¹⁷

Two sentences that Mother gave in 1965 in response to a question about national unity in India summarize the importance of the nation in our time:

The unity of all the nations is the compelling future of the world. But for the unity of all nations to be possible, each nation must first realise its own unity.¹⁸

This inner law, this real self, this foundation of inner unity on the scale of the nation is not just the haphazard assemblage of human beings living together, but a group-soul being, “a living power of the eternal Truth,”¹⁹ with a particular purpose in terrestrial evolution. Sri Aurobindo and Mother called this living power the nation soul.

Individuals and the nation soul

The nation has the right to be itself and develop accordingly, just as the individual does, not only for its own sake but also for the sake of humanity and the world.²⁰

Individuals are the catalysts for the work of national development into true unity. The recognition of the spiritual dimension of life “must necessarily be accomplished in the individual and in a great number of individuals before it can lay any effective hold upon the community. The Spirit in humanity discovers, develops, builds its formations first in the individual...”²¹ But for the individuals



to evolve to their fullest, a fundamental equality among them within their society is essential.²²

So there is an interdependence between the full development of the individual and the perfection of its social aggregate. Here we have come upon the true meaning and essential value of patriotism. A psychological patriotism is a sign of the growth of a conscious national ego and an expression of its soul.²³

There must be a sort of religion of country, a constant even if not always explicit recognition not only of the sacredness of the physical mother, the land, but also, in however obscure a way, of the nation as a collective soul which it is the first duty and need of every man to keep alive, to defend from suppression or mortal attainment or, if suppressed, then to watch, wait and struggle for its release and rehabilitation, if sickened over with the touch of any fatal spiritual ailment, then to labour always to heal and revivify and save alive.²⁴

Mother tells us that true patriots identify with their nation's soul and aspire to discover its true nature and role.²⁵ She recommends a patriotic involvement of the citizen in the nation's development not only, as Sri Aurobindo says, for its own sake but also for the sake of humanity and the world.²⁶

Sri Aurobindo praised Germany's intensive efforts to discover its soul through the work of its great philosophers and musicians, while he warned at the same time of the danger of falling into the disastrous error, to which Germany succumbed, of mistaking its collective ego for its soul: "[W]e have all to do the same thing which Germany has attempted, but to take care not to do it likewise."²⁷ Mother said an individual—for France she gave the examples of St. Genevieve and Jeanne d'Arc—can even embody the nation soul.²⁸

All of this suggests how the individual can assist the emergence of the nation's soul. First comes the individual work, for an individual can come in contact with the

national soul only when one is conscious of one's own psychic being.²⁹ Second, the individual can seek to discover and help realize his or her nation's true nature and role in the worldwide symphony of nations. And third, the individual can help build the national opportunities for and expressions of that "fundamental equality" necessary for the full development of all people in that society. While these "steps" are listed here in numerical order for the sake of clarity, in practice they are by no means strictly chronological or separate. More likely, they will interact in feedback loops unique and surprising to each person who takes up the work.

Sri Aurobindo and Mother on the USA

In their writings and conversations, Sri Aurobindo and Mother had many things to say about the United States of America. In this essay, we focus on the American soul.

Already in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sri Aurobindo remarked that in the formation of the United States a real collective soul was moving, however obscurely at first, toward its inevitable external unification. It "is a distinct group-soul which is driven by inward necessity and uses outward circumstances to constitute for itself an organised body."³⁰ A little later in the same work he even identifies the political organization of the United States as the system by which an imperial aggregate³¹ could change from a political to a psychological unit, "a system in which each element could preserve a sufficient local State independence and separate power of legislative and executive action and yet be part of an inseparable greater aggregate."³²

Around the same time he noted that the effort of the United States to achieve a great and separate cultural existence is not fully succeeding because of a structural defect: its language dependence on England.

Neither its literature, in spite of two or three great names, nor its art nor its thought, nor anything else on the

higher levels of the mind, has been able to arrive at a vigorous maturity independent in its soul-type. And this because its instrument of self-expression, the language which the national mind ought to shape and be in turn shaped by it, was formed and must continue to be formed by another country with a different mentality and must there find its centre and its law of development.³³

In a later footnote amending this statement, Sri Aurobindo acknowledged that an independent development in language was taking place in the United States, but he cautioned that one would have to see "how far this becomes a truly vigorous reality... Even in the farthest development," he added, "it would only be a sort of dialect, not a national language."³⁴

America's spiritual destiny

During their lives Sri Aurobindo and Mother already saw how closely America's destiny was bound to India. In 1926 Sri Aurobindo wrote that America's spiritual destiny was only a possibility, not yet decided. It depended on Americans themselves to realize it. If realized, this great possibility would unite American prowess in material life with India's riches in the spiritual life so that these two poles of life become one:

America must be able to receive freely India's riches and to give freely in return from her own for the material organisation of a higher life on the physical plane; this is at once a condition and her chance.³⁵

Decades later he reflected on the accomplishment of the great dreams of his life. One of them was the sharing of India's spirituality with the world, including America:

Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow;



amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.³⁶

This overflowing river of India's riches into America has been recently documented in a book by Philip Goldberg, *American Veda*.³⁷ So India, it seems, has been doing her part in this partnership.

According to Udar Pinto, Mother rephrased Sri Aurobindo's words about the connection between the United States and India. They "were the countries chosen for the great work of leading the world to its transformation. The U.S.A. with its great material strength and India with its spiritual force."³⁸

A conversation recorded in *Mother's Agenda* of 1963 may also relate to the connection between the two countries. Mother was telling about a remarkable seven-month-old baby sage whom she saw the previous day. "He looks at you with his soul. When I looked at him, his eyes lit up. Doesn't cry, doesn't speak, but he made a sort of noise—he stretched out his arms to me and seemed to say, 'Aaah!' Then I took him in my arms, and he laid his head there, on my heart—he didn't close his eyes, he became ecstatic." He made such an impression on her that she wondered if it was Sri Aurobindo himself. "It's a new thing, I have never seen such a baby, never."

After speaking about the child like this for a while, she may have been alluding to the occult connection between India and America in what she says next:

He came to earth in America (that's already a sign), but his parents are Indians.

Entirely conceived and formed, all nine months, in America. And



Khrushchev and Kennedy. Photo by Associated Press.

born in America. He spent the first four or five months of his life in America. His mother, before marrying, told me, "I will have a child only when I want it and, I hope, in the way I want it." It was no accident.³⁹

Some conversations recorded in *Mother's Agenda* imply that America has a particular significance for Mother's work. For example, she spoke often about President John F. Kennedy, sometimes suggesting that he was an instrument for her work, as in the following passages:

Kennedy has been assassinated, that means the possibility of war. He was one of the instruments for the establishment of peace—it's a setback for the entire political history of the earth.⁴⁰

The rapprochement between Russia and America is something I have been working on for years. I thought I had succeeded, when Kennedy was assassinated; and at the time, Khrushchev was well-disposed—both gone! One is assassinated, the other dismissed.⁴¹

You know he [Kennedy] was truly in favor of freedom, and not only freedom but union. And he was receptive. You know how he worked for the Blacks there (moreover, that's the external cause of his death). But he

was the one I counted on, not without reason, as he had shown signs of assent to a union with Russia to establish peace on earth.⁴²

In 1962 she said that the Americans "may be the first to awaken"⁴³ because of their receptivity. In 1971 she predicted that the center of transformation would be in America and that the conversion of the United States was "in the offing."

I personally have the feeling there is a close and invisible connection between America's aspiration, as it is now, and the book [Satprem's *On the Way to Superhumanity*]. I have the feeling that's where the center of transformation will be... In America there's an aspiration. That's where the push will be, that's where (pointing to the manuscript) ... the bomb must go off...⁴⁴

One of the things in the offing is the conversion of America, the United States, but it will take time....

So, the things in the offing are a federation of all the states of India, and another one in the offing is the conversion of the United States. A federation of the states of India along the lines of *The Ideal of Human Unity*, as conceived and explained by Sri Aurobindo. And the conversion of the United States is in the same idea, just according to Sri Aurobindo's revelation. But that will take time.⁴⁵

One brief comment of Sri Aurobindo recorded by Nirodbaran suggests that Sri Aurobindo, although noncommittal himself about the imminent conversion of America, was aware of Mother's expectations of the United States at least as far back as 1936:



Nirodbaran: Somehow I feel that America would be the first to accept your message and through it your work will be spread all over the West. True?

Sri Aurobindo: Possibly. Mother has always expected something special from America.⁴⁶

The American dream

“Four score and seven years ago, our forefathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Acclaimed religious historian Huston Smith wrote that these words from Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg address compress into a statement of the American dream both the ideals of the nation’s founders and the purpose for which Lincoln pursued the bloody Civil War among the American states. Smith paraphrased the dream as follows: “The American dream, which holds out great promise for the future, is the dream of freedom and equality for everyone.”⁴⁷

Modern democracy rests on a trinity of elements, including freedom and equality, both prominent in the Declaration of Independence and in the sentence quoted above from Lincoln’s Gettysburg address. Sri Aurobindo wrote that the aim of the democratic ideal—he called it the *religion of humanity*—“was formulated in the eighteenth century by a sort of primal intuition; that aim was and it is still to re-create human society in the image of three kindred ideas, liberty, equality and fraternity.”⁴⁸ Note that the third element, fraternity or unity, received less emphasis in the founding documents of the United States. Nonetheless it can be seen in the union of the colonies against the world’s superpower, Great Britain; in “We the people” from the prolog of the American Constitution; and in the informal motto of the United States during its first 200 years, *e pluribus unum* (from many, one).

Sri Aurobindo described these qualities as the “three godheads of the soul.” He spelled out their spiritual dimension as follows:

When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead in all human beings. When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity. These three things are in fact the nature of the soul; for freedom, equality, unity are the eternal attributes of the Spirit.⁴⁹

Here we have a good foundation for the shining qualities of the American soul’s dream. In his book on the American soul, philosopher Jacob Needleman noted that American founders like Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin likewise conceived of American democracy in terms of self-development: “To a significant extent, democracy in its specifically American form was created to allow men and women to seek their own higher principle within themselves.”⁵⁰

These three soul qualities, Sri Aurobindo added, cannot be realized “through the external machinery of society or by man so long as he lives only in the individual and the communal ego.” On the ego level, freedom and equality clash and polarize instead of harmonizing around a larger realization. Americans who pay attention to the civic life of their country see this highlighted every day. “Yet is brotherhood the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity,” Sri Aurobindo wrote of the solution. “The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else.”⁵¹ One can almost hear in this declaration a call to move the American dream another step beyond rhetoric towards realization.

In a later essay of this series we shall

investigate a severely neglected portion of American society for whom fraternity, which they call “all my relations,” is a central, if not *the central*, value and practice. As we saw earlier, Sri Aurobindo said it was up to Americans themselves to seize the dream and realize it. In the light of Sri Aurobindo’s insistence on brotherhood as the key to real democracy, acknowledgment and inclusion of this repressed part of American society may be crucial steps on the road to that realization. We may find that these neglected Americans had and still have to some degree the “lost knowledge” to which the emerging subjectivism of our age is a “road of return.”⁵² As for the likelihood of recovering widely that lost knowledge, we can take heart from Mother’s comment about conquered peoples: “[I]t’s always the dominator that learns the lesson from the dominated.”⁵³

During the Second World War, Sri Aurobindo acknowledged America’s progress in the democratic ideal during an exchange of letters with a disciple about the wisdom of supporting the Allied powers in the war:

What I have said is not that the Allies have never done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces...

But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England—the present Allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and introduced self-governing bodies and parliamentary institutions where they did not exist; and whatever the relative worth of these things, they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage, in a forward evolution.⁵⁴

Sri Aurobindo’s argument about the contribution of the Allies to a forward evolution despite their past failures is worth remembering when considering the soul of the nation. We do not need to



claim that America's soul qualities have been visible or predominant either in the vast majority of citizens or in most of the collective actions of the nation. Rather we are looking for glimpses of the nation's soul still obscured behind the national "egoism, the pride of domination and the desire of expansion [that] still govern the mind of humanity..."⁵⁵

Other qualities of the American soul

Besides the "three godheads of the soul," other qualities of America that show up in Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's conversations and writings about America include youthfulness, receptivity, material realization, practicality, and individualism.

Sri Aurobindo and Mother described the United States as youthful and immature. Earlier we recalled Sri Aurobindo's comment about the failure of the life of the mind to reach "a vigorous maturity" in the United States because of its language dependence on England. In passages below, we'll see that Mother said America had the ways of a child, was childlike or was like a baby bird. They observed this youthfulness in the context of America's receptivity and enthusiasm as well as of her ignorance, arrogance and conceit.

Remember that Sri Aurobindo considered America's receptivity to India's spirituality the key to her destiny. He called America's eagerness and openness to new things "one considerable advantage of America."⁵⁶ Mother also acknowledged the importance of American receptivity.

Naturally America is a young country, so its ways are those of a child, but of a fairly ill-bred child. But the older countries have become too old and can no longer react, they shake their heads and wonder if after all

this youth is not right.⁵⁷

But there is a place where something is awakening, a small something like what little children and animals have, going like this (Mother imitates a baby bird poking its beak out of the nest and peering around), peep-peep-peep, oh, alert and eager to know: America.

They have a carapace as hard as an automobile's—it has to be hammered open, but underneath there's something that wants to know ... and knows nothing, nothing, is totally ignorant—but oh, it wants to know! And this can be touched. They may be the first to awaken. A few in India,

Remember that Sri Aurobindo considered America's receptivity to India's spirituality the key to her destiny. He called America's eagerness and openness to new things "one considerable advantage of America."

but a more widespread movement in America.... All this is for the next hundred years.⁵⁸

The Americans are more open [than Europeans], because they have remained more childlike—they think they know everything on a material level, but they also know that there are things they don't know.⁵⁹

Since Integral Yoga is *integral*, inclusive of matter, we should not be surprised that both Sri Aurobindo and Mother recognized America's famous materialism as a potential ally, even a necessity, for achieving its spiritual destiny, as well as an obstacle. In his 1926 letter to a Pittsburgh, PA, distributing company, Sri Aurobindo noted approvingly that the United States "has shown a preeminent capacity of realization... on the material plane," and tied that to her spiritual destiny.⁶⁰ George Nakashima reported: "I had heard many times while I was in Pondicherry of the Mother's reaction to the necessity of American pragmatism and even some

materialism as something to be developed with Indian spirituality..."⁶¹

Although thoughtful Americans often speak of our materialism only as a failing or cultural shadow, remember that Sri Aurobindo himself explicitly urged recognition of the *sacredness* of "the physical mother, the land," which is the material dimension of the nation. Elsewhere he called the land "the shell" of the nation's body, and added it is "a very living shell indeed and potent in its influences on the nation..."⁶² Many American poets, from Whitman to modern poets like N. Scott Momaday and Mary Oliver, celebrate this sacredness and potency of the land. And of course, indigenous people are well known for their

reverence for the land, the Earth Mother.

Love of the land, expertise in the material world,

or even a near-exclusive turn towards the material plane may be ways that the World-Soul uses to make matter more pliable for the transformation. There are in fact those among us today who recognize a distinctive awakening of *matter itself* in America.⁶³

Besides Nakashima's inclusion of *pragmatism* with materialism in his report of Mother's comments, we have other records of Mother valuing the pragmatism of America. In 1965, after an incident in which an Ashram typewriter keyboard adjustment was bungled, she was wondering how India would ever make material progress. She recalled the powerful effect that American practicality had on Japan as a result of the American occupation after World War II. If India had an American occupation, she said, like the Japanese "they [Indians] would become very practical, they would learn to put order in what they do—which they quite lack..."⁶⁴

In another conversation, Satprem reads Mother an article he has written in which he mentions what quality each country represents. For example, France is



clarity of intellect, Germany is ingenuity, and so on. Mother interrupts:

You said nothing for the United States.

S: What is it?

M: Practical organization.⁶⁵

So what exactly does pragmatism or practicality mean in the American context? That many consider Pragmatism to be America's most significant contribution to philosophy highlights its importance for the country. American historian Daniel Boorstin, describing how American pragmatism emerged from the pioneer experience, gives a succinct definition:

We sometimes forget how gradual was the 'discovery' of America; it was a by-product of the occupation of the continent. To act, to move on, to explore also meant to push back the frontiers of knowledge; this inevitably gave a practical and dynamic character to the very idea of knowledge. To learn and to act became one.⁶⁶

We could say that knowledge, in this view, is always tested by practice, even subordinated to it. For Euro-Americans, this interaction between knowledge and action has often been at the level of material survival and conquest in a new environment. Thus the frequent connection between pragmatism and materialism in American culture.

Sri Aurobindo seems to have alluded to this kind of pragmatism when he wrote about the success of Paramahansa Yogananda in America:

His propaganda is admirably suited to the practical mentality of a western and especially of an American public and his statement of ideas on subjects like Karma to its present capacity of understanding in these matters...⁶⁷

Another quality noted by foreign visitors and beloved of Americans is individualism.

Sri Aurobindo expressed it this way:

In America the attachment to individualism and the capitalistic system of society and a strong antagonism not only to Communism but to even a moderate Socialism remains complete and one can foresee little possibility of any abatement in its intensity.⁶⁸

We have already reviewed Sri Aurobindo's insistence on the importance of the individual as the catalyst for national evolution. He also saw its centrality for terrestrial evolution. Of the relationship in the world among the illumined individual, the universal, and the Transcendent, he wrote:

The individual is still necessary to the action of the Transcendent in the universe.... [S]ince the conscious manifestation of the Transcendent in the individual is the means by which the collective, the universal is also to become conscious of itself, the continuation of the illumined individual in the action of the world is an imperative need of the world-play.⁶⁹

So when we refer to individualism as a quality nurtured by the American soul, we are pointing towards this illumined individuality that the extreme individualism of the outer being in American culture may be signaling and preparing.

Finally, in the passage quoted above about how America's occupation of Japan brought a beneficial practicality to Japanese culture, Mother noted another benefit, appreciation of beauty, that passed in the opposite direction, from Japan to America:

And the Americans are now the disciples of the Japanese: from the point of view of Beauty they have made wonderful and absolutely unexpected progress.⁷⁰

To make all of this more concrete, let's take one cultural item, a gritty and

award-winning documentary, *Born into Brothels*, to illustrate some of these qualities. The film is an extraordinary collaboration between a New York photographer, Zana Briski, and a group of children from a brothel in the red light district of Calcutta. On Briski's second trip to India, she was drawn to the plight of the women of the brothel, and so she moved with her camera into a room in the building and over several years established relationships with the women trapped there by illiteracy, poverty, and the need to support their families. What she didn't anticipate was the interest of the children of the brothel in her and her camera. She fell in love with them and eventually agreed to teach a group of them photography. The film shows the awakening of these children to themselves as real individuals, to their dreams for a better life, and to their various efforts to achieve their dreams—largely told in their own words and through their eyes via the stunning photos and video they took of their world. All with the guidance, patience, respect, and near infinite persistence of Briski.

In this film we see a moving instance of the collaboration between India and America. India's spirituality was a motivator for Briski—the film's credits briefly mention an Indian guru and the Dalai Lama—and during the film and in the directors' commentary on it, we see and hear of her appreciation of Indian spirituality and religious ceremony, even in the brothel, and certainly in the stunning beauty-in-the-rough of the children. In return Briski brings her formidable powers of material organization in service of the children's emerging individuality, the freedom to determine their lives for themselves, and their awakening to beauty in their world through the art of photography. For years she endures the chaos of brothel life and takes on the rigidity of the Indian social system and the inertia of the bureaucracy to find a market for the children's photography and good schools that will take these children of society's dregs and help them realize a new life. Everything she accomplishes for them—including a year-long effort, finally successful,



to get a visa for one of her star pupils to travel to an international photography show in Amsterdam—is at their request, with their enthusiastic participation, and with the willingness of their families.

Even as Briski embodies and supports qualities of receptivity, material organization, freedom, fraternity, individuality, beauty, and appreciation of youthfulness, she appears largely to avoid shadow qualities associated with America, like arrogance, conceit, ignorance, and assumption of moral superiority. And the results, both in the esthetic quality of the film and in the actual lives of the children, are sheer magic.

Shadows of the American soul

Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's words on the USA are straightforward. It does have a nation soul. Its destiny is intimately tied to India's and even seems to be central to the coming transformation. Its core democratic values are genuine soul qualities, even if the outward eye still sees active mainly the ego shadows of those qualities. It is a young soul with the enthusiasm and openness and receptivity of youth. And since its postwar occupation of Japan, it is developing a national sense of beauty.

They also identified problems obstructing its development. Most of the soul qualities we have considered so far have a dark twin or a shadow aspect by which the ego distorts the soul quality for its own narrow gain. Liberty distorted can manifest as "do whatever you want." Sri Aurobindo called it "competitive individualism."⁷¹ Equality's shadow might show up as a sense of entitlement without commitment or effort. Youthfulness, besides bringing enthusiasm and receptivity to new ideas, often displays its inexperience as lack of discernment and shallowness, as



Tinsel-toons #7. (From: <http://simplyxmas.wordpress.com/2008/11/19/tinsel-toons-7>)

conceit and arrogance, and on a national scale, as commercialism, imperialism and militarism. Materialism in the United States often means denial of any other reality than matter.

Language dependence

Let's return to Sri Aurobindo's words about American language dependence on England. He knew a thing or two about language; and out of that knowledge he said it was of *the utmost value* for a nation to have and keep its own separate language, for it is *the sign and power of the soul* of the people:

A language helps to bring those who speak it into a certain large unity of growing thought, formed temperament, ripening spirit.... For each language is the sign and power of the soul of the people which naturally speaks it. Each develops therefore its own peculiar spirit, thought-temperament, way of dealing with life and knowledge and experience.... Therefore it is of the utmost value to a nation, a human group-soul, to preserve its language and to make of it a strong and living cultural instrument. A nation, race or people which loses its language cannot live its whole life or its real life.⁷²

He reinforced this argument by describing how much the English-speaking British colonies⁷³ of the time lost by not having their own language at the center of their public life: They "are really separate peoples in the psychological sense..." with "a different temperament, a bent of their own, a developing special character. But this new personality can only appear in the more outward and mechanical parts of

their life and even there in no great, effective and fruitful fashion."

Why?

[B]ecause by the fact of their speech they are and must be mere provinces of England. Whatever peculiarities they may develop in their mental life tend to create a type of provincialism and not a central intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual life of their own with its distinct importance for mankind.⁷⁴

He then turned to the American continents and observed that the United States in particular still displayed exactly this provincialism, despite its vigorous attempts at a separate cultural existence. He attributed this failure directly to the USA's language dependence on England.

For the same reason the whole of America, in spite of its powerfully independent political and economic being, has tended to be culturally a province of Europe, the south and centre by their dependence on the Spanish, and the north by its dependence on the English language. The life of the United States alone tends and strives to become a great and separate cultural exist-



ence, but its success is not commensurate with its power. Culturally, it is still to a great extent a province of England. Neither its literature, in spite of two or three great names, nor its art nor its thought, nor anything else on the higher levels of the mind, has been able to arrive at a vigorous maturity independent in its soul-type. And this because its instrument of self-expression, the language which the national mind ought to shape and be in turn shaped by it, was formed and must continue to be formed by another country with a different mentality and must there find its centre and its law of development.⁷⁵

This was evidently a major difficulty for the American soul in Sri Aurobindo's view, with no resolution in sight today. The use of English in America inhibits the American soul's self expression because the language was formed by a people with a *different mentality*.

A key clause here, "the language which the national mind ought to shape and be in turn shaped by it," brings to mind a controversy during the middle of the last century in linguistics that is relevant to our discussion. Is language influenced—"shaped," in Sri Aurobindo's word—by worldview and vice versa? Does the way a people selects sounds and meanings by the use of their particular language influence or shape the mind and cultural assumptions of that people? And conversely, do the particular understandings of the world held by a people influence the sounds, structure, and meanings that the language of their culture can handle?

On one side of the controversy, many linguists studying tribal languages thought that there was a universal human grammar that just happened to correspond to the grammar of Western European languages. For example, they expected the



Iconic photo of the "summer of love," Woodstock, 1969.

tenses—past, present, and future—which seem so natural to us, so obviously common sense, to have some explicit markers in every language, like they do in English or French. An absence of such tense markers was considered evidence of some defect in the language.

A creative and pioneering linguist named Benjamin Lee Whorf championed the other view: that languages (including grammar) were much more relative, variable, and distinctive. Whorf argued, based on his study of the Hopi language, that different languages encode valuable and *unique* ways of knowing and perceiving even fundamental qualities like time and space. The Hopi language does not, for example, have tense markers corresponding to the past, present, and future of English. Traditional Hopi culture has a different way of understanding time, and their language includes markers for that understanding. For Whorf the loss of a language was a loss for humanity because it involved the permanent disappearance of the unique ways of knowing encoded in the language and the bodies of valuable knowledge based on them.

It's now becoming clear that American indigenous languages represent ways of knowing and perceiving closer in important respects both to Asian yoga and to Western quantum mechanics than the mainstream Western worldview.⁷⁶ This is an area that will draw our attention in

much greater detail in a future essay on America's destiny and spiritual practice in the light of Integral Yoga. Could indigenous languages and the cultures and worldviews they represent offer an evolutionary bridge away from America's excessive language dependence on England and towards a truer, more distinct and robust expression of the American soul, perhaps a new cultural synthesis that would benefit not only the country but the world?

It's difficult to see how this could happen because indigenous languages in the United States and other American countries are mutually unintelligible and vanishing completely or *barely* surviving. It's difficult to see; but it's also true that we rarely can see the surprising, no, the *impossible* futures that keep unfolding on this magic, many-visaged planet.

But many-visaged is the cosmic Soul;
A touch can alter the fixed front of Fate.
A sudden turn can come, a road
appear.⁷⁷

Mother may have given us a hint about how such a miraculous road could appear in America when she answered a question about the difficulties posed for national unity by the multiple languages of India:

Unity must be a living fact and not the imposition of an arbitrary rule. When India will be one, she will have spontaneously a language understood by all.⁷⁸

American youth

Both Sri Aurobindo and Mother remarked about America's youth as a source of beneficial qualities as well as difficulties. Here we focus on the shadow side.

Sri Aurobindo noted a striking immaturity of the life of the mind in the United States, given its efforts to be an in-



dependent cultural entity. Elsewhere he wrote about America's openness of mind to new things. But in the next sentence he cautioned about a potential shallowness, "We have to see whether this [openness to new things] will be sufficient to open the mind also to deep and true things."⁷⁹

Mother connected American youthfulness to several unflattering characteristics including lack of discernment, conceit, stupidity, ignorance, and commercialism.

Discernment

Mother remarked that Americans have "absolutely no discernment," when speaking about a former disciple who was playing as a guru intermediary between Sri Aurobindo and the American public.

[The Americans have] Absolutely no discernment.

He [the former disciple] must have something, but I don't feel anything! (Mother makes

a gesture as thin as cigarette paper.) It's something without force. But K., too, when she was in America, was quite under his thumb... If one has ambition, it is relatively quite easy to draw a [subtle] being to oneself, who naturally comes under very deceptive disguises, and then to believe oneself to be the incarnation of a great personality.⁸⁰

Conceit and arrogance

On several occasions, the *Agenda* records Mother's fierce remarks about the shadow side of America's spiritual destiny—a legendary conceit, arrogance, and exaggerated self regard which cover over an appalling stupidity and ignorance both of life and of Americans' own deeper motivations. Once upon a time we called this impulse "manifest destiny;" today it lives on as American exceptionalism.

Those Americans are nothing but

bluffers—they bluff, bluff, bluff for everything. They come with grand airs, they will right all wrongs, correct all mistakes, enlighten all minds—and they're just at ground level.⁸¹

Oh, are they conceited! ... And puffed up with their superior realization—they were born to HELP the earth. They have such goodwill! They want to help the whole earth, (in an ironic tone) help the earth. They come here, but instead of asking themselves what they can learn, they come TO HELP; they come to bring some order (there's "no order"!), to set right the things that are wrong, to bring some practical sense into these nebulous minds!⁸²

Oh, are they conceited! ... And puffed up with their superior realization—they were born to HELP the earth. —The Mother

But to the United Nations I have sent a lot of messages: lots of people there have talked about it [a brochure, "Spiritual Unity of India," that India and Pakistan are one]. They are quarreling. There at the United Nations, it has kicked up a din. Only, the Americans are quite unrivaled in their stupidity! All the more so as they are puffed up with conceit—they are convinced that they are the leading nation of the world, so that puts the final touch to stupidity.⁸³

Carapace

Mother used the metaphor of *carapace* to describe the rigid belief formations covering over the youthful receptivity and enthusiasm that she found in Americans and America. In biology the carapace is the hard or bony upper shell of the crab or scorpion or turtle. It covers and protects the soft inner parts. The rigid shell sug-

gests an immature or incomplete development of self knowledge, a lack of integration between the outer and the inner. On different occasions Mother described or alluded to three forms of American carapace: an asuric Christianity, materialism, and the cult of the mind. In the first passage below she says that the carapace is not only hard, but also that it can be "hammered open" revealing a truer dimension of American potential.

They have a carapace as hard as an automobile's—it has to be hammered open, but underneath there's something that wants to know ... and knows nothing, nothing, is totally ignorant—but oh, it wants to know! And this can be touched. They may be the first to awaken. A few in India,

but a more widespread movement in America.... All this is for the next hundred years.⁸⁴

In a conversation some months later about the solid "Christian carapace" of Europe, Mother noted the same thing in America. She singled out Protestant Christianity in particular for its lack of the occult sense and rejection of the worship of the Virgin. She also alluded to the resistance of materialism in the same conversation.

Even in America, *mon petit*, they're in its grip. They're always falling back into their Christianity. It's going to be very hard....

It's a real hodgepodge, that religion—the number of sects! The only common ground is the divinity of Christ, and it became asuric when he was made out to be unique: there has been but ONE incarnation, Christ. That's just where it all went wrong. We'll see. It is resisting, resisting everywhere. It's even more resistant than materialism.⁸⁵



On other occasions Mother zeroed in directly on the difficulty of materialism in America and elsewhere. Here is an example:

True, India is the only place in the world which is still aware that something else than matter exists. The other countries have quite forgotten it: Europe, America and elsewhere.... That is why she still has a message to preserve and deliver to the world.⁸⁶

In a passage about the “interminable work” in the physical mind, Mother spoke about a crisis in the United States “of discouraged pessimism,” especially among American youth. She traced it to a “cult of the mind.” America’s revolting young people of the 1960s had discovered “all that was hollow, false, unreal in the old way of seeing life, and they haven’t found anything to replace it with....”

[T]hey haven’t found the true path. Because it’s not a mental path. Everywhere there is still the cult of the mind, that’s the terrible thing.⁸⁷

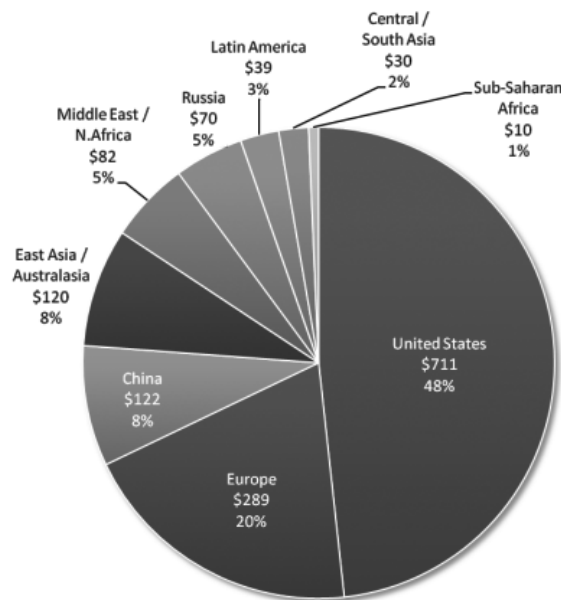
Elsewhere she spoke of Westerners—she explicitly included Americans—with a “modern education” or “modern turn of mind” requiring the particular way of explaining things found in Satprem’s *The Adventure of Consciousness*.⁸⁸

Although the connection is not explicit in these passages, it’s easy enough to put the materialism of America that has forgotten that anything but matter exists, side by side with the modern turn of mind found in America, and end up with a cult of the mind that cannot find the true path because the true path is not mental. Historian Huston Smith puts it this way: “Normally, however, modernity recognizes no ontological connection between material things and their metaphysical, spiritual roots.”⁸⁹

US Military Spending vs. The World, 2008

(in billions of US dollars and % of world total)

2008 Total Military Spending: \$1.473 Trillion



Source: Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, February 20, 2008.

Sri Aurobindo also spoke of how the modern mind of materialism and positivism, obstructed by an exaggerated weight given to the intellect, was far removed from the experience of divine and eternal wisdom.⁹⁰

Temptation to empire

First recall the context of this temptation. Sri Aurobindo told us that the world-spirit’s drive towards human unity wants to use the new nation-type that is coming to birth with a real soul hidden in its folds. But this move towards unity emerges when national egoism, pride in domination and the desire of expansion—the very founts of imperialism—“still govern the mind of humanity.”⁹¹ International politics, he said, is still “a play of natural forces and interests” because the emerging soul ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality are not strong enough yet to rule on their own. They “are only a comparatively recent development of the human mind.” On the international level they can prevail only where they are in tune with the

self interest—i.e., egoism—of the parties involved or assisted by other “natural forces strong enough to overbear these interests which oppose them.”⁹²

This analysis fits like a glove on the United States. In its history the United States has teetered on an edge between a pacifism and anti-militarism, on one hand, and on the other a strain of imperialism going back to the seizure of lands from the Native people from the beginning, the importation of slaves from Africa, and the conquest of over half of Mexico in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848).

Sri Aurobindo noted that the “United States were always pacific and non-imperialistic in sentiment and principle...”⁹³ Recall, for example, that the United States disbanded the army after the Revolutionary War. Early American foreign policy reflected

“its pacificism, its anti-militarism [at least *outside* of North America], its aversion to entanglement in European complications or any close touch with the politics of Europe, its jealousy of interference by the European Powers in American affairs in spite of their possession of colonies and interests in the Western hemisphere.”⁹⁴ This foreign policy was in tune with both American self interest and other natural forces. Sri Aurobindo said that the qualities embedded in this policy were part of the “traditional temperament of the American people”⁹⁵ and were “largely due to the instinct that this separateness is the sole security for the maintenance of its [the USA’s] institutions and the peculiar type of its national life.”⁹⁶

Disinterest in imperialism has also played out in later stages of American history. Sri Aurobindo cited as examples the American idea of the League of Nations and the liberation of Cuba and the Philippines. In its relationship with these two countries, American self interest coincided with its non-imperialistic sentiment because the United States was not able



to swamp Cuba and the Philippines with American colonists the way it did when it grabbed Texas from Mexico.

American idealism was always governed by a shrewd sense of American interests, and highest among these interests is reckoned by preservation of the American political idea and its constitution, to which all imperialism, foreign or American, has to be regarded as a mortal peril.⁹⁷

Writing in 1943, Sri Aurobindo said that although America had been imperialistic in the past and still bears the burden of that past, she has since “forsworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, in Cuba, the Philippines—everywhere apart from some islands in the Pacific which would go plop into other hands, if she withdrew from them.”⁹⁸

But besides disinterest in imperialism, Sri Aurobindo also identified “an undertone of nationalistic susceptibility”⁹⁹ to imperialism in the American mind that led to wars of conquest against Spain and Mexico; and he wondered how long America’s disinterest in imperial adventure could survive against the rising tide of imperialistic sentiment in the Old World.¹⁰⁰

Once militarised, once cast into the vortex of old-world politics, as it at times threatens to be, nothing could long protect the States from the necessity of large changes in the direction of centralisation and the weakening of the federal principle.¹⁰¹

By 2012, the United States has cast itself ever more deeply into “old-world politics” through two world wars and the cold war. It has roughly 700 foreign military bases and outposts, far more than any other nation. And its domestic police are taking on more and more military prac-

tices and equipment.

Sri Aurobindo’s views about war and militarism, and the concentration of powers that they require, were complex. On one hand, nations which “have failed to evolve or to preserve this concentration of powers, have always tended to fare ill in the battle of life....”¹⁰² And humanity’s utilitarian reason demands this centralization of power for a convenient, well-ordered social and economic life. As even an Australian Aborigine presenter, who spoke vehemently against imperialism at one of the Language of Spirit Conferences referred to earlier, admitted, “We like comfort, too.”¹⁰³

On the other hand, the centralization of power drives towards uniformity, which does not easily include the important vari-

First of all the commercial mentality should be driven out from the world. This will take some time.... This has so perverted men's mind, that it is for them the criterion. —The Mother

ations which “the principle of life seems always to demand, the free variation and subtly diverse application of uniform principles.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, the principle of unity enacted as mechanical uniformity cannot cohabit with the freedom and variety that nature insists on.

The solution Sri Aurobindo envisioned was a “spiritual religion of humanity”¹⁰⁵ founded so solidly on an inward realization of unity that free variation of expression and practice was its natural flowering. “That day is not yet,”¹⁰⁶ he wrote.

Meanwhile, he touched upon another kind of imperialism, *financial* instead of military or political, that could tempt the United States, as we will see in the next section.

Economic barbarism

Sri Aurobindo and Mother considered the commercial mentality of the current industrial/economic age barbaric.

Both had harsh and enlightening things to say about it.

Mother once gave an extended example of the commercial mentality with an American face, and tied it to America’s immaturity.

First of all the commercial mentality should be driven out from the world. This will take some time.... This has so perverted men’s mind, that it is for them the criterion. You see, in America when someone is spoken about, it is said: “He, oh, he is worth a million dollars!” This indeed is the greatest compliment one can pay.

And it is this: someone asks, “Do you know this person? What is he worth?” – “He is worth a hundred thousand dollars,” “He is worth five hundred dollars.” So this means that he has a position which brings him this. “Is he intelligent, is he stupid? Is he...” this is not

at all important. Is he a good man or a bad one? That makes no difference at all! Is he a rich man or a poor one? “If he is rich, ah, ah! I would like to know him very much! If he is poor, I have nothing to do with him.” There! Naturally America is a young country, so its ways are those of a child, but of a fairly ill-bred child.¹⁰⁷

Sri Aurobindo in his characteristic way sliced to the bone. The science of the West, he said, despite its benefits, has encouraged a “kind of barbarism—for it can be called by no other name—that of the industrial, the commercial, the economic age which is now progressing to its culmination and its close. This economic barbarism is essentially that of the vital man who mistakes the vital being for the self and accepts its satisfaction as the first aim of life.... His ideal man is... the successful man.”

To arrive, to succeed, to produce, to accumulate, to possess is his exist-



ence... To the natural unredeemed economic man beauty is a thing otiose or a nuisance, art and poetry a frivolity or an ostentation and a means of advertisement. His idea of civilisation is comfort, his idea of morals social respectability, his idea of politics the encouragement of industry, the opening of markets, exploitation and trade following the flag, his idea of religion at best a pietistic formalism or the satisfaction of certain vitalistic emotions. He values education for its utility in fitting a man for success in a competitive... industrial existence, science for the useful inventions and knowledge, the comforts, conveniences, machinery of production with which it arms him... The opulent plutocrat and the successful mammoth capitalist and organiser of industry are the supermen of the commercial age and the true... occult rulers of its society.¹⁰⁸

In this passage we hear again Sri Aurobindo's warning about mistaking the vital being for the self and then making the satisfaction of the vital the first aim of life. By nature the modern nation seeks its true self, its soul. We all have to participate in that search, he said, but "take care"¹⁰⁹ not to mistake the ego for the soul.

If you noticed the word plutocrat in the passage two paragraphs above, your eye might pick it out again in Sri Aurobindo's *War and Self-Determination* where he mentioned "plutocratic America"¹¹⁰ in a discussion of the worldwide struggle between labor (communism and socialism) and capitalism after World War I. Plutocracy means government by the wealthy, or by an elite whose power derives from their wealth.

Calling America "plutocratic," would have a familiar ring to American social reform movements, from Coxey's Army¹¹¹ to Occupy Wall Street, which have resisted the stranglehold on economic opportunity and power of the ruling "1 percent." In 2012, commercialism is essentially globalized, at least for the remainder of the oil age. As a result, big financial forces and

imperial tendencies are siamese twins. In 1943, long before globalization was so widespread, Sri Aurobindo noted that the United States might be tempted "towards a sort of financial imperialism, the rule of the Almighty American Dollar, by her new sense of international power..." He assumed that she would withdraw from this temptation because of other strong tendencies in her character.¹¹²

She may yet withdraw, but barbaric global commercialism demands the enforcement of financial imperialism, if not military and political imperialism. At the same time, the rise of Asia, which Sri Aurobindo foretold in the same chapter of *War and Self-Determination* footnoted above, is becoming an international curb on "the rule of the Almighty American Dollar" and may encourage her withdrawal.

Competitive individualism

"The individualistic age of Europe was in its beginning a revolt of reason,"¹¹³ Sri Aurobindo wrote in a rich chapter of *The Human Cycle*, "The Age of Individualism and Reason," that still rings deeply today. He saw how European individualism and rationalism gradually swept away the corrupt and petrified conventions of Medieval Europe—ecclesiastical, political, economic, social. "The individualism of the new age is an attempt to get back from conventionalism of belief and practice to some solid bed-rock, no matter what, of real and tangible Truth."¹¹⁴ The reintroduction of the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans had returned to Europe the free curiosity of the Greek mind and the "Roman's large practicality and sense for ordering life with a robust utility."¹¹⁵ The Protestant Revolt championed the right of the individual to discover his own relationship with God and his own interpretation of the Bible—hence the proliferation of Protestant sects. The United States came to birth amid this enthusiasm of the rights of the individual. English colonists on these shores were filled with these ideas and looked on America as a proving ground for them.

But Sri Aurobindo also saw what a

dangerous experiment this was.

Yet the truths which Europe has found by its individualistic age covered only the first more obvious, physical and outward facts of life and only such of their more hidden realities and powers as the habit of analytical reason and the pursuit of practical utility can give to man.¹¹⁶

Manifestly, the unrestrained use of individual illumination or judgment without either any outer standard or any generally recognisable source of truth is a perilous experiment for our imperfect race. It is likely to lead rather to a continual fluctuation and disorder of opinion than to a progressive unfolding of the truth of things. No less, the pursuit of social justice through the stark assertion of individual rights or class interests and desires must be a source of continual struggle and revolution and may end in an exaggerated assertion of the will in each to live his own life and to satisfy his own ideas and desires which will produce a serious malaise or a radical trouble in the social body.¹¹⁷

In 1949 he noted that even an outer political limitation, e.g., socialism, on this unrestrained individualism was absent in America.

In America the attachment to individualism and the capitalistic system of society and a strong antagonism not only to Communism but to even a moderate Socialism remains complete and one can foresee little possibility of any abatement in its intensity.¹¹⁸

Reading these words, we seem to be looking into a mirror of American national life today. This is the "competitive individualism"¹¹⁹ he wrote about, when the *ego* claims liberty and perverts it. For it is not yet "founded upon a change of the inner human nature and inner way of living,"



and especially on fraternity. For “brotherhood [is] the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity. The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else.”¹²⁰

It remains to be seen if and how a true soul-brotherhood/sisterhood emerges in the American nation. We have Mother’s prediction, described above, of the conversion of the United States. No doubt there are clues to this potential in many places. One example is the response of Cheyenne Grandmother Margaret Behan¹²¹ at a recent conference to a statement of apology and commitment to indigenous peoples. If the United States made a statement of apology to its Native peoples,¹²² she said, a dam of love would burst and spread over this land.

The map is not the territory

Finally, a caution: It’s important to remember that the reflections in this essay do not equate to the American psychic being. “The mind describes and explains,” Mother said. “The psychic sees and understands.”¹²³ The mind makes models to understand what it can, and it easily confuses the models with the reality they point to with more or less accuracy. The model is never complete, never the reality. To put it simply, what we *think* is not what is.

A thought is an arrow shot at the truth; it can hit a point, but not cover the whole target. But the archer is too well satisfied with his success to ask anything further.¹²⁴

Even when we use Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s terms or quote them directly, each of us uses those words in the context of our own mostly-hidden assumptions and understandings. Mental maps or models have their place in pointing our awareness in the right direction, but *knowing* the soul of the nation, just like knowing the soul of the individual, comes as intuition, a direct apprehension, a glimpse or even a face-to-face meeting on the inner road.

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81. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, 3/21/64, p. 89.

82. *Ibid.*, 1/18/64, p. 29.

83. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, 11/10/65, p. 291.

84. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, 7/14/62, p. 260.

85. *Ibid.*, 12/15/62, p. 456.

86. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, 4/5/67, p. 102.

87. *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, 11/13/68, p. 318

88. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, 5/25/63, p. 151.

89. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (New York: HarperOne Publications, 1991), p. 379.

90. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, p. 154, 219.

91. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, p. 349.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 527.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 531.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 440.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 531.

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 440-441.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 531.

98. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, p. 214.

99. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, p. 531.

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 348-349.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 441.

102. *Ibid.*

103. Personal communication.

104. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, p. 443.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 577.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 527.

107. *The Mother*, CWM, Vol. 7, pp. 307-308.

108. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, pp. 79-80.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 675.

111. See Wikipedia for a sketch of this protest during the economic depression of 1893-1897: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coxey%27s_Army

112. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, p. 214.

113. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, p. 16.

114. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

117. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 592.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 569.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 570.

121. She is a sculptress, poet, playwright, and member of the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers: <http://www.grandmotherscouncil.org/>

122. To read and sign this statement, see: <http://declarationofcommitment.com/>

123. *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 12, 12/13/71, p. 332.

124. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Divine and Human*, "Thoughts and Aphorisms" (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1994), p. 445

America must be able to receive freely India's riches and to give freely in return from her own for the material organisation of a higher life on the physical plane; this is at once a condition and her chance. —Sri Aurobindo (*Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 388)



Source Material

A message to America

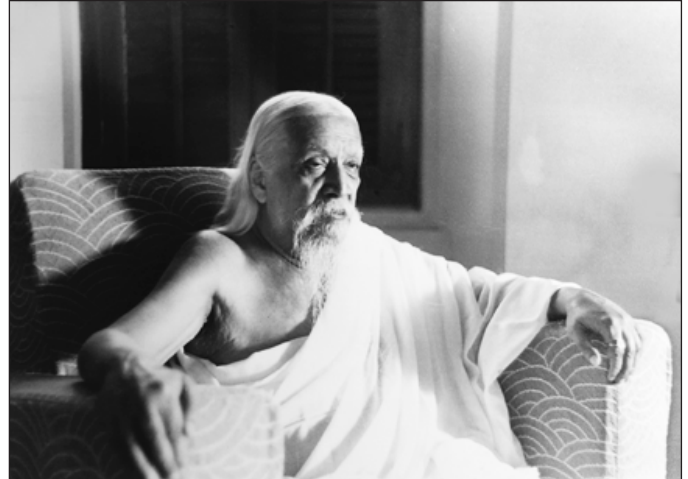
by Sri Aurobindo

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

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

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

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



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

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

The process of evolution has been the development from and in inconscient Matter of a subconscient and then a conscious Life, of conscious mind first in animal life and then fully in conscious and thinking man, the highest present achievement of evolutionary Nature. The achievement of mental being is at present her highest and tends to be regarded as her final work; but it is possible to conceive a still further step of the evolution: Nature may have in view beyond the imperfect mind of man a consciousness that passes out of the mind's ignorance and possesses truth as its inherent right and nature. There is a truth-



consciousness as it is called in the Veda, a supermind, as I have termed it, possessing Knowledge, not having to seek after it and constantly miss it. In one of the Upanishads a being of knowledge is stated to be the next step above the mental being; into that the soul has to rise and through it to attain the perfect bliss of spiritual existence. If that could be achieved as the next evolutionary step of Nature here, then she would be fulfilled and we could conceive of the perfection of life even here, its attainment of a full spiritual living even in this body or it may be in a perfected body. We could even speak of a divine life on earth; our human dream of perfectibility would be accomplished and at the same time the aspiration to a heaven on earth common to several religions and spiritual seers and thinkers.

The ascent of the human soul to the supreme Spirit is that soul's highest aim and necessity, for that is the supreme reality; but there can be too the descent of the Spirit and its powers into the world and that would justify the existence of the material world also, give a meaning, a divine purpose to the creation and solve its riddle. East and West could be reconciled in the pursuit of the highest and largest ideal, Spirit embrace Matter and Matter find its own true reality and the hidden Reality in all things in the Spirit. (*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vol. 36, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2006, pp. 551-553)

What we say is not that the Allies have not done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces. I have not said that at random, but on what to me are clear grounds of fact. What you speak of is the dark side. All nations and governments have been that in their dealings with each other, —at least all who had the strength and got the chance. I hope you are not expecting me to believe that there are or have been virtuous governments and unselfish and sinless peoples! But there is the other side also. You are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; looked at like that all have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England—the present Allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and spread too the institutions which try to embody them. Whatever the relative worth of these things—they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage of the forward evolution. (What about the others? Hitler, for example, says it is a crime to educate the coloured peoples, they must be kept as serfs and laborers.) England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has also conceded independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. She has been moving away steadily, if slowly, from imperialism towards co-operation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction: she is moving in idea towards a world-union of some kind in which aggression is to be made impossible; her new gen-

eration has no longer the old firm belief in mission and empire; she has offered India Dominion independence—or even sheer isolated independence, if she wants that, —after the war, with an agreed free constitution to be chosen by Indians themselves.... All that is what I call evolution in the right direction—however slow and imperfect and hesitating it may still be. As for America she has forsworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, she has conceded independence to Cuba and the Philippines. ... Is there a similar trend on the side of the Axis? One has to look at things on all sides, to see them steadily and whole. Once again, it is the forces working behind that I have to look at, I don't want to go blind among surface details. The future has to be safeguarded; only then can present troubles and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated....

For us the question does not arise. We made it plain in a letter which has been made public that we did not consider the war as a fight between nations and governments (still less between good people and bad people) but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric. What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions which are common to human nature and all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces: the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question and all other considerations are either irrelevant or of a minor importance. The Allies at least have stood for human values, though they may often act against their own best ideals (human beings always do that); Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical (e.g. the virtues of the *Herrenvolk*, the master race). That does not make the English or Americans nations of spotless angels nor the Germans a wicked and sinful race, but as an indicator it has a primary importance....

The Divine takes men as they are and uses men as His instruments even if they are not flawless in virtue, angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord's side, that is enough for the work to be done. Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities opened to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open—to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real, the central fact, the need to remove the peril of black servitude and revived barbarism threatening India and the world, and leave for a later time all side-issues and minor issues or hypothetical problems that would cloud the one all-important tragic issue before us. —3 September 1943 (CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 464-468)



Soul qualities of nations

by the Mother

Message for America: Stop thinking that you are of the West and others of the East. All human beings are of the same divine origin and meant to manifest upon earth the unity of this origin. —4 August 1949 (CWM, Vol. 13, p. 387)

Divine Mother, Firstly, what is the role of the United States with regard to the building of the new world?

The work of U.S.A. is to provide the financial help needed to prepare the earth for the new creation.

Secondly, what must the people of the United States do in order to begin to be able to fulfil this role?

Become aware of those, individual or organisation, capable of bringing about this transformation and give them the necessary money. —9 June 1968 (CWM, Vol. 13, p. 254)

It is only when people feel that it is their good fortune to help Auroville grow that the funds will come abundantly. —December 1969 (CWM, Vol. 13, p. 255)

Message for raising funds for Matrimandir:

Give your money to the Divine work and you will be richer than you would be by keeping it. (CWM, Vol. 13, p. 256)

Divine Mother, Could we have a message from you to pass along to those in the United States who may be ready to aid in the fund-raising work we are doing?

Money is not meant to make money; money is meant to make the earth ready for the New Creation. —15 June 1966 (CWM, Vol. 13, pp. 388).

...regarding a new American disciple

... Oh, are they conceited! ... And puffed up with their superior realization - they were born to HELP the earth. They have such goodwill! They want to help the whole earth, (*in an ironic tone*) help the earth. They come here, but instead of asking themselves what they can learn, they come TO HELP; they come to bring some order (there's "no order"!), to set right the things that are wrong, to bring some practical sense into these nebulous minds!

The other conceit seems to me more serious than the American one—the European conceit. Because they really think they are very intelligent. The Americans want "to help"—they're children. But the Westerners are "sages" of the intellect; so it takes some doing to penetrate their minds!... There's nothing they need to learn.



I have very little contact with those people.

Well, exactly! They are the ones: a fortress. It's the entire European "elite."

Especially the French, no?

The French very much so, but almost everywhere in Europe: the Germans, the...

The Italians don't think they have a superior intelligence.

But the Germans, the British ...

Oh, the British, that's a different phenomenon, mon petit! Anything that isn't British is worthless! (*Mother laughs*) The British alone are practical, the British alone are intelligent, the British alone know how to live, the British alone are powerful, the British alone ... In short, there are only the British, the entire earth ought to be British—but the British, I took a thorough dislike to them when I was five years old! [[It may be recalled that Mother had an English governess.]] (*Mother laughs*) I remember, I always used to say, "But our real enemies" (as a child, just like that, between us), "our real enemies aren't the Germans: it's always been the British." And then I had, like Sri Aurobindo, a great admiration for Napoleon, so I had quite a grudge against them for the way they treated him.

Oh, no! The British ... (laughing) the only thing that rehabilitated them in the world's history is that Sri Aurobindo went to study in their country! But he clearly said that during his studies there, his whole feeling of intimacy was with France, not England.

Oh, the British ... No, the British haughtiness certainly isn't just a legend. What gave them that? Where does it come from? Because, basically, they are Normans, aren't they.

But they became islanders, it's an island.

Yes, that's the main reason. (CWM, Vol. 5, pp. 28-30)



*Message for the Inauguration of a
French Institute at Pondicherry:*

In any country the best education that can be given to children consists in teaching them what the true nature of their country is and its own qualities, the mission their nation has to fulfil in the world and its true place in the terrestrial concert. To that should be added a wide understanding of the role of other nations, but without the spirit of imitation and without ever losing sight of the genius of one's own country. France meant generosity of sentiment, newness and boldness of ideas and chivalry in action. It was that France which commanded the respect and admiration of all: it is by these virtues that she dominated the world.

A utilitarian, calculating, mercantile France is France no longer. These things do not agree with her true nature and in practising them she loses the nobility of her world position.

This is what the children of today must be made to know. —4 April 1955 (CWM, Vol. 13, p. 387)

It is France that can connect Europe with India. There are great spiritual possibilities for France. She will play a big part in spite of her present bad condition. It is through France that the spiritual message will reach Europe. That is why I chose France for my birth, although I am not French. (The Mother's father was Turkish, her mother Egyptian. They emigrated from Egypt to France in 1877, one year before her birth.) (CWM, Vol. 13, p. 387)

How is one to explain this age-old enmity between the Jews and the Arabs (although having a common ancestor) hating each other, generation on generation up to the impasse in which we have been living from some days back?

Perhaps the enmity exists only because they are neighbours!

Violence and enmity.. when brothers hate, they hate much more than others. Sri Aurobindo has said: "Hate is the indication of the possibility of a much greater love."

Could we think that these two great peoples in conflict represent the symbolic Forces called to decide the fate of our civilisation?

It is not this conflict that will decide the future of our civilisation.

The Mussulmans and the Israelites represent the two religions where the faith in God is the most extreme. Only, the faith of the Israelites is a faith in an impersonal God and the faith of the Mussulmans is a faith in a personal God.

The Arabs have passionate natures. They live almost exclusively in the vital, with its passions, its desires, while the Israelites live chiefly in the mind with a greater power of organisation and of realisation, which is quite exceptional. The Israelites are intellectuals with a remarkable will. They are not sentimental, that is to say they do not like weakness.

The Mussulmans are impulsive, the Israelites are rational. —June 1967 (CWM, Vol. 13, pp. 390-391)

Message for the Sri Aurobindo Society, Osaka, Japan:

Japan was in the physical world the teacher of beauty. She must not renounce her privilege. Blessings. —16 October 1972

Those who serve the Truth cannot take one side or another. Truth is above conflict and opposition.

In Truth, all countries unite in a common effort towards progress and realisation. —8 June 1967

How can you believe that the Grace works for one nation or against another? The Grace works for Truth and in the present conditions of the world, Truth and falsehood are both present everywhere, in all nations. It is the human mind which thinks: this one is right and that one is wrong—right and wrong are present everywhere. The Truth is above all conflicts and all oppositions. —13 June 1967

May I have a clarification from you on two points?

(1) *Does not the Grace work for whatever Truth there may be on both sides of a conflict?*

Yes.

Or does it keep altogether aloof just because either side has falsehood also?

No. I said work—it is a constant working.

(2) *Do the present conflicts differ radically from a conflict like World War II, in which the Grace worked definitively and decisively on one side at least on the whole?*

You are mixing up two things, the working of the Grace and the result which is the inevitable consequence of the triumph of the Truth: they are quite different things on a different level.

The progressive victory of the Truth brings automatically certain results complex and often unexpected by the human mind which always wants clean cuts. It is only a total vision both in time and space that can understand. —14 June 1967

All countries are equal and essentially "one".

Each of them represents an aspect of the One Supreme.

In the terrestrial manifestation they all have the same right to a free expression of themselves.

From the spiritual point of view, the importance of a country does not depend on its size or its power or its authority over other countries, but on its response to Truth and on the degree of Truth it is capable of manifesting. (CWM Vol. 13, pp. 389-391)



The poetry room

From The Rishi

Hear then the truth. Behind this visible world
The eyes see plain,
Another stands, and in its folds are curled
Our waking dreams.
Dream is more real, which, while here we wake,
Unreal seems.
From that our mortal life and thoughts we take.
Its fugitive gleams
Are here made firm and solid; there they float
In a magic haze,
Melody swelling note on absolute note,
A lyric maze,
Beauty on beauty heaped pell-mell to chain
The enchanted gaze,
Thought upon mighty thought with grandiose strain
Weaving the stars.
This is that world of dream from which our race
Came; by these bars
Of body now enchained, with laggard pace,
Borne down with cares,
A little of that rapture to express
We labour hard,
A little of that beauty, music, thought
With toil prepared;
And if a single strain is clearly caught,
Then our reward
Is great on earth, and in the world that floats
Lingering awhile
We hear the fullness and the jarring notes
Reconcile,—
Then travel forwards. So we slowly rise,
And every mile
Of our long journey mark with eager eyes;
So we progress
With gurge of revolution and recoil,
Slaughter and stress
Of anguish because without fruit we toil,
Without success;
Even as a ship upon the stormy flood
With fluttering sails
Labours towards the shore; the angry mood
Of Ocean swells,
Calms come and favouring winds, but yet afar
The harbour pales
In evening mists and Ocean threatens war:
Such is our life.
Of this be sure, the mighty game goes on,
The glorious strife,

Until the goal predestined has been won.
Not on the cliff
To be shattered has our ship set forth of old,
Nor in the surge
To founder. Therefore, King, be royal, bold,
And through the urge
Of winds, the reboant thunders and the close
Tempestuous gurge
Press on for ever laughing at the blows
Of wind and wave.
The haven must be reached; we rise from pyre,
We rise from grave,
We mould our future by our past desire,
We break, we save,
We find the music that we could not find,
The thought think out
We could not then perfect, and from the mind
That brilliant rout
Of wonders marshal into living forms.
End then thy doubt;
Grieve not for wounds, nor fear the violent storms,
For grief and pain
Are errors of the clouded soul; behind
They do not stain
The living spirit who to these is blind.
Torture, disdain,
Defeat and sorrow give him strength and joy:
'Twas for delight
He sought existence, and if pains alloy,
'Tis here in night
Which we call day. The Yogin knows, O King,
Who in his might
Travels beyond the mind's imagining,
The worlds of dream.
For even they are shadows, even they
Are not,—they seem.
Behind them is a mighty blissful day
From which they stream.
The heavens of a million creeds are these:
Peopled they teem
By creatures full of joy and radiant ease.
There is the mint
From which we are the final issue, types
Which here we print
In dual letters. There no torture grips,
Joy cannot stint
Her streams,—beneath a more than mortal sun
Through golden air
The spirits of the deathless regions run.
But we must dare
To still the mind into a perfect sleep
And leave this lair
Of gross material flesh which we would keep



Always, before
The guardians of felicity will open
The golden door.
That is our home and that the secret hope
Our hearts explore.
To bring those heavens down upon the earth
We all descend,
And fragments of it in the human birth
We can command.
Perfect millenniums are sometimes, until
In the sweet end
All secret heaven upon earth we spill,
Then rise above
Taking mankind with us to the abode
Of rapturous Love,
The bright epiphany whom we name God,
Towards whom we drove
In spite of weakness, evil, grief and pain.
He stands behind
The worlds of Sleep; He is and shall remain
When they grow blind
To individual joys; for even these
Are shadows, King,
And gloriously into that lustre cease
From which they spring.
We are but sparks of that most perfect fire,
Waves of that sea:
From Him we come, to Him we go, desire
Eternally,
And so long as He wills, our separate birth
Is and shall be.
Shrink not from life, O Aryan, but with mirth
And joy receive
His good and evil, sin and virtue, till
He bids thee leave.
But while thou livest, perfectly fulfil
Thy part, conceive
Earth as thy stage, thyself the actor strong,
The drama His.
Work, but the fruits to God alone belong,
Who only is.
Work, love and know,—so shall thy spirit win
Immortal bliss.
Love men, love God. Fear not to love, O King,
Fear not to enjoy;
For Death's a passage, grief a fancied thing
Fools to annoy.
From self escape and find in love alone
A higher joy.

—Sri Aurobindo

1861

Arm'd year! year of the struggle!
No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you, terrible
year!
Not you as some pale poetling, seated at a desk, lisping
cadenzas piano;
But as a strong man, erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing,
carrying a rifle on your shoulder,
With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands—with a
knife in the belt at your side,
As I heard you shouting loud—your sonorous voice ringing
across the continent;
Your masculine voice, O year, as rising amid the great cities,
Amid the men of Manhattan I saw you, as one of the workmen,
the dwellers in Manhattan;
Or with large steps crossing the prairies out of Illinois and
Indiana,
Rapidly crossing the West with springy gait, and descending
the Alleghanies;
Or down from the great lakes, or in Pennsylvania, or on deck
along the Ohio river;
Or southward along the Tennessee or Cumberland rivers, or at
Chattanooga on the mountain top,
Saw I your gait and saw I your sinewy limbs, clothed in blue,
bearing weapons, robust year;
Heard your determin'd voice, launch'd forth again and again;
Year that suddenly sang by the mouths of the round-lipp'd
cannon,
I repeat you, hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year.

—Walt Whitman

Aftermath

When the summer fields are mown,
When the birds are fledged and flown,
And the dry leaves strew the path;
With the falling of the snow,
With the cawing of the crow,
Once again the fields we mow
And gather in the aftermath.
Not the sweet, new grass with flowers
Is this harvesting of ours;
Not the upland clover bloom;
But the rowen mixed with weeds,
Tangled tufts from marsh and meads,
Where the poppy drops its seeds
In the silence and the gloom.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



A brook In The city

The farmhouse lingers, though averse to square
With the new city street it has to wear
A number in. But what about the brook
That held the house as in an elbow-crook?
I ask as one who knew the brook, its strength
And impulse, having dipped a finger length
And made it leap my knuckle, having tossed
A flower to try its currents where they crossed.
The meadow grass could be cemented down
From growing under pavements of a town;
The apple trees be sent to hearth-stone flame.
Is water wood to serve a brook the same?
How else dispose of an immortal force
No longer needed? Staunch it at its source
With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was thrown
Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone
In fetid darkness still to live and run—
And all for nothing it had ever done
Except forget to go in fear perhaps.
No one would know except for ancient maps
That such a brook ran water. But I wonder
If from its being kept forever under,
The thoughts may not have risen that so keep
This new-built city from both work and sleep.

—Robert Frost

A bird came down

A bird came down the walk:
He did not know I saw;
He bit an angle-worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew
From a convenient grass,
And then hopped sidewise to the wall
To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all abroad,—
They looked like frightened beads, I thought;
He stirred his velvet head

Like one in danger; cautious,
I offered him a crumb,
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home

Than oars divide the ocean,
Too silver for a seam,
Or butterflies, off banks of noon,
Leap, splashless, as they swim.

—Emily Dickinson

The delight song of Tsoai-Talee

I am a feather on the bright sky
I am the blue horse that runs in the plain
I am the fish that rolls, shining, in the water
I am the shadow that follows a child
I am the evening light, the lustre of meadows
I am an eagle playing with the wind
I am a cluster of bright beads
I am the farthest star
I am the cold of the dawn
I am the roaring of the rain
I am the glitter on the crust of the snow
I am the long track of the moon in a lake
I am a flame of four colors
I am a deer standing away in the dusk
I am a field of sumac and pomme blanche
I am an angle of geese in the winter sky
I am the hunger of a young wolf
I am the whole dream of these things

You see, I am alive, I am alive
I stand in good relation to the Gods
I stand in good relation to the earth
I stand in good relation to everything that is beautiful...
You see, I am alive, I am alive

—Navarre Scott Momaday

Awaking in New York

Curtains forcing their will
against the wind,
children sleep,
exchanging dreams with
seraphim. The city
drags itself awake on
subway straps; and
I, an alarm, awake as a
rumor of war,
lie stretching into dawn,
unasked and unheeded.

—Maya Angelou



Apropos

Make your own Bible. Select and collect all the words and sentences that in all your readings have been to you like the blast of a trumpet. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. —Carl Sagan

There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty—it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God. —Mother Teresa

The possession of knowledge does not kill the sense of wonder and mystery. There is always more mystery. —Anaïs Nin

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, It is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. —St. Francis of Assisi

There are situations which may seem beyond endurance and circumstances beyond sufferance. It is then that those who have learned how to withdraw into their interior being, how to return to their source, may find some measure of help and strength. —Paul Brunton

A sacrifice to be real must cost, must hurt, and must empty ourselves. Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in his love than in your weakness. —Mother Teresa

One thing: you have to walk, and create the way by your walking; you will not find a ready-made path. It is not so cheap, to reach to the ultimate realization of truth. —Osho

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize at the center of the universe dwells the Great Spirit, and that its center is really everywhere, it is within each of us. —Black Elk

God made the world for the delight of human beings—if we could see His goodness everywhere, His concern for us, His awareness of our needs: the phone call we've waited for, the ride we are offered, the letter in the mail, just the little things He does for us throughout the day. As we remember and notice His love for us, we just begin to fall in love with Him because He is so busy with us—you just can't resist Him. I believe there's no such thing as luck in life, it's God's love, it's His. —Mother Teresa

One of the most important of life's lessons is to learn independence, to understand freedom. This means independence from attachments, from results, from opinions, and from expectations. Breaking attachments leads to freedom, but breaking attachments does not mean abandoning a loving and meaningful relationship, a relationship that nourishes your soul. It means ending dependency on any person or thing. Love is never a dependency. —Brian L. Weiss

Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering. —Miguel Ruiz

If a man is to live, he must be all alive, body, soul, mind, heart, spirit. —Thomas Merton

Live simply. Deepest joy is like a flower... beautiful in essence. —Tony Samara

The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it. —Henri J.M. Nouwen

The Holy Land is everywhere. —Black Elk

I understand once again that the greatness of God always reveals itself in the simple things. —Paulo Coelho

Like those in the valley behind us, most people stand in sight of the spiritual mountains all their lives and never enter them, being content to listen to others who have been there and thus avoid the hardships. —Robert M. Pirsig

My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind. —Albert Einstein

We tend to be preoccupied by our problems when we have a heightened sense of vulnerability and a diminished sense of power. Today, see each problem as an invitation to prayer. —John Ortberg Jr.

Being well adjusted to a sick society is not an indication of health. —Krishnamurti

He who does not reflect his life back to God in gratitude does not know himself. —Albert Schweitzer

Religion is, in reality, living. Our religion is not what we profess, or what we say, or what we proclaim; our religion is what we do, what we desire, what we seek, what we dream about, what we fantasize, what we think—all these things—twenty-four hours a day. One's religion, then, is one's life, not merely the ideal life but the life as it is actually lived. —Jack D. Forbes

Make peace with silence, and remind yourself that it is in this space that you'll come to remember your spirit. When you're able to transcend an aversion to silence, you'll also transcend many other miseries. And it is in this silence that the remembrance of God will be activated. —Wayne W. Dyer

Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness. —Meister Eckhart