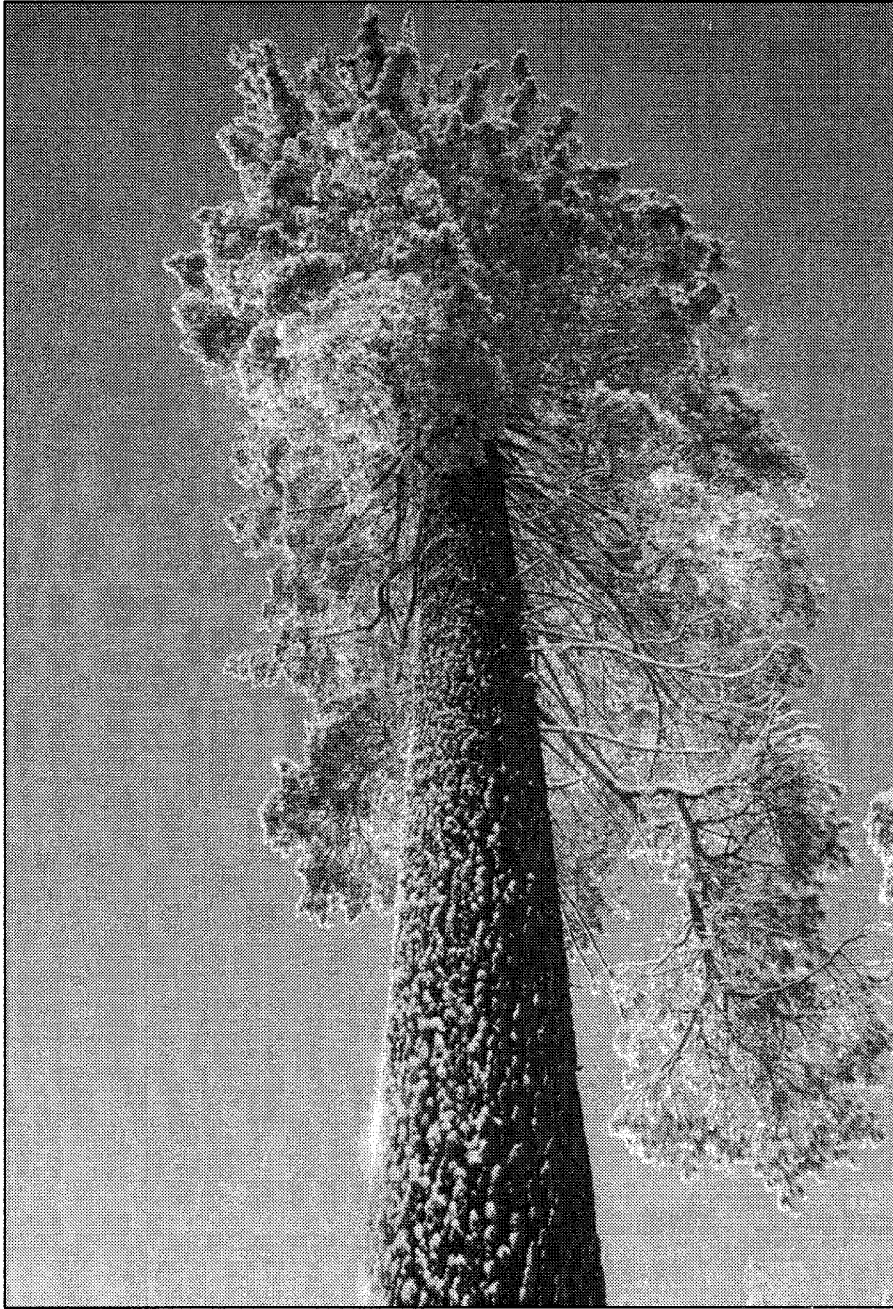


Collaboration

Spring 2000

Journal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Vol. 26, no. 1



Man is a transitional being; he is not final. For in man and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees that climb to a divine supermanhood. There lies our destiny and the liberating key to our aspiring but troubled and limited mundane existence.

The new consciousness attained in the spiritual evolution is always higher in grade and power, always larger, more comprehensive, wider in sight and feeling, richer and finer in faculties, more complex, organic, dominating than the consciousness that was once our own but is now left behind us. There are greater breadth and space, heights before impassable, unexpected depths and intimacies. There is a luminous expansion that is the very sign-manual of the Supreme upon his work.

Cease inwardly from thought and word, be motionless within you, look upward into the light and outward into the vast cosmic consciousness that is around you. Be more and more one with the brightness and the vastness. Then will Truth dawn on you from above and flow in from all around you.

—Sri Aurobindo, “Man a Transitional Being,” Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, vol. 17, pp. 7–12.

**Georges Van Vrekhem's new biography of the Mother • Sri Aurobindo: Inside, outside, upside down
Eight questions • Quantum candles • How to spot a neo-auro-yogi**

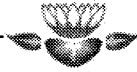


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Collaboration (ISSN 0164-1522) is published by the Sri Aurobindo Association (SAA), a California nonprofit religious corporation, P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816 USA; e-mail: saa@collaboration.org; phone: 209-339-3710, ext. 6; fax: 209-339-3715; on the Web at <http://www.collaboration.org>.

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Staff for this issue: David Hutchinson, editor; Lynda Lester, associate editor; Lynda Lester, layout and production; Marta Belén and Tom Parker, proofreaders; Kalpana Patel and Chandresh Patel, mailing.

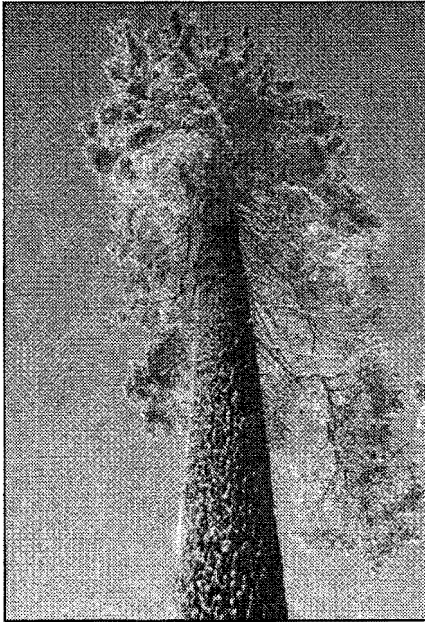
Subscriptions: A one-year subscription (three issues) to *Collaboration* is \$20 (\$32 for airmail outside the USA). A patron subscription is \$40 or more for three issues.

Submissions: *Collaboration* welcomes writing, photos, and artwork relevant to the Integral Yoga and spirituality. Submit material by e-mail to editor@collaboration.org; by fax at 916-451-9039; or by post to *Collaboration*, P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816 USA. *Collaboration* cannot be held responsible for loss or damage of unsolicited material. Letters to the editor may be published unless you indicate otherwise. Letters and articles may be edited for style and space considerations.

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

Love is the power and passion of the divine self-delight and without love we may get the rapt peace of its infinity, the absorbed silence of the Ananda, but not its absolute depth of richness and fullness. Love leads us from the suffering of division into the bliss of perfect union, but without losing that joy of the act of union which is the soul's greatest discovery and for which the life of the cosmos is a long preparation. Therefore to approach God by love is to prepare oneself for the greatest possible spiritual fulfillment.—Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, vol. 21, p. 523.



On the cover: Sun glints off spring snow on a California pine. (Photo by Marta Belén)

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Shiva Vangara's paintings are based on spirituality and evolution in light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. More of his works may be seen on the Web at http://www.pondy-central.com/arts/aditi_arts/. He may be reached at aditi_shiva@yahoo.com.

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Fundamentals

Quantum candles and centers of consciousness

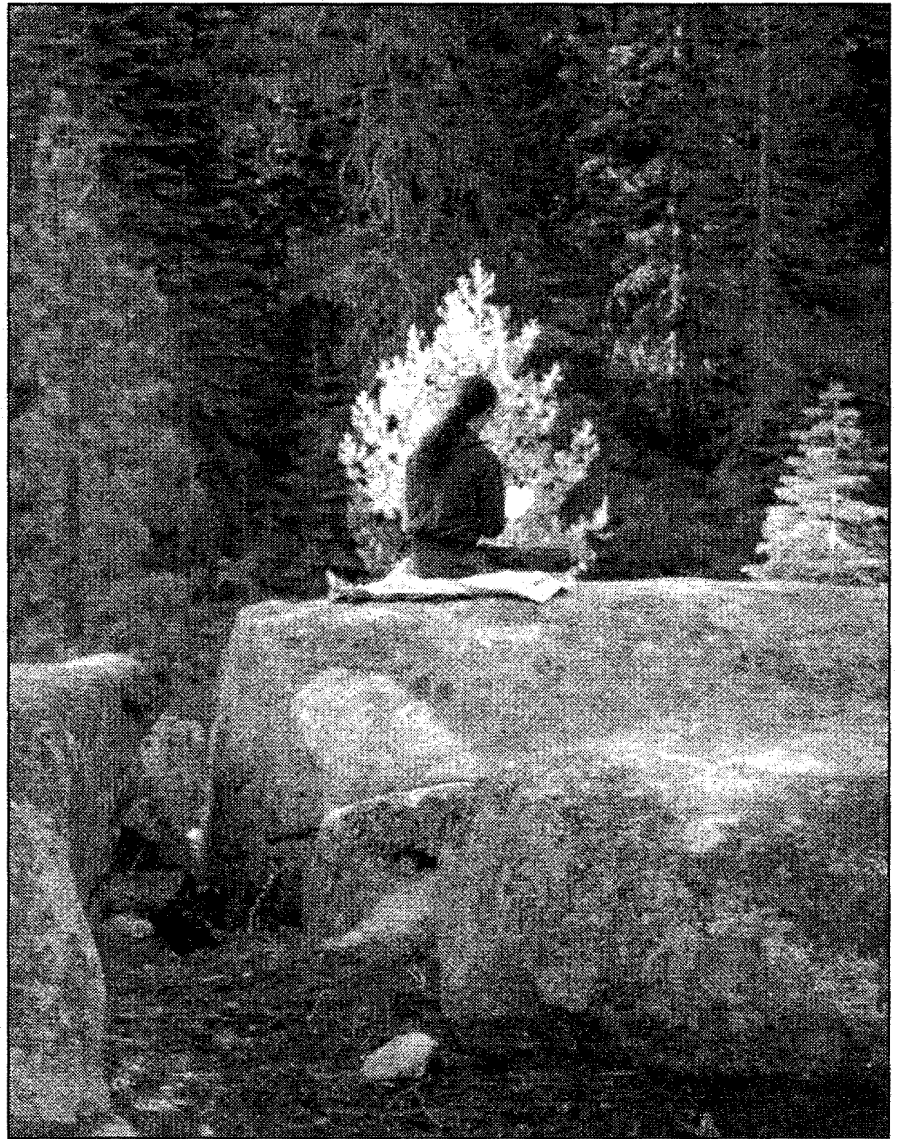
Sri Aurobindo on faith, experience, and concentration

This selection is from Letters on Yoga, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, vol. 23, pp. 517–519 and 628–629.

What do I want of you besides aspiring for faith? Well, just a bit more thoroughness and persistence in the method! Don't aspire for two days and then go into the dumps, evolving a gospel of earthquake and Schopenhauer plus the ass and all the rest of it. Give the Divine a full sporting chance. When he lights something in you or is preparing a light, don't come in with a wet blanket of despondency and throw it on the poor flame. You will say, "It is a mere candle that is lit—nothing at all!" But in these matters, when the darkness of human mind and life and body has to be dissipated, a candle is always a beginning—a lamp can follow and afterwards a sun; but the beginning must be allowed to have a sequel and not get cut off from its natural sequelae by chunks of sadness and doubt and despair.

At the beginning, and for a long time, the experiences do usually come in little quanta with empty spaces between—but, if allowed its way, the spaces will diminish, and the quantum theory give way to the Newtonian continuity of the spirit. But you have never yet given it a real chance. The empty spaces have been peopled with doubts and denials and so the quanta have become rare, the beginning remains a beginning . . .

To put it more soberly—accept once and for all that this thing has to be done, that is the only thing left for you yourself or the earth. Outside are earth-



Flame of aspiration. (Photo by Marta Belén)

quakes and Hitlers and a collapsing civilization and, generally speaking, the ass and the flood. All the more reason to tend towards the one thing to be done, the thing you have been sent to aid in getting done. It is difficult and the way long and the encouragement given meager? What then? Why should you expect so great a thing to be easy or that there must be either a swift success or none?

The difficulties have to be faced and the more cheerfully they are faced, the sooner they will be overcome. The one thing to do is to keep the mantra of

success, the determination of victory, the fixed resolve, "Have it I must and have it I will." Impossible? There is no such thing as impossibility—there are difficulties and things of *longue haleine*, but no impossibles. What one is determined fixedly to do will get done now or later—it becomes possible.

You have asked what is the discipline to be followed in order to convert the mental seeking into a living spiritual experience. The first necessity is the



practice of concentration of your consciousness within yourself. The ordinary human mind has an activity on the surface which veils the real Self. But there is another, a hidden consciousness within behind the surface one in which we can become aware of the real Self and of a larger deeper truth of nature, can realise the Self and liberate and transform the nature. To quiet the surface mind and begin to live within is the object of this concentration.

Of this true consciousness other than the superficial there are two main centres, one in the heart (not the physical heart, but the cardiac centre in the middle of the chest), one in the head. The concentration in the heart opens within and by following this inward opening and going deep one becomes aware of the soul or psychic being, the divine element in the individual. This being unveiled begins to come forward, to govern the nature, to turn it and all its movements towards the Truth, towards the Divine, and to call down into it all that is above. It brings the consciousness of the Presence, the dedication of the being to the Highest and invites the descent into our nature of a greater Force and Consciousness which is waiting above us. To concentrate in the heart centre with the offering of oneself to the Divine and the aspiration for this inward opening and for the Presence in the heart is the first way and, if it can be done, the natural beginning; for its result once obtained makes the spiritual path far more easy and safe than if one begins the other way.

That other way is the concentration in the head, in the mental centre. This, if it brings about the silence of the surface mind, opens up an inner, larger, deeper mind within which is more capable of receiving spiritual experience and spiritual knowledge. But once concentrated here one must open the silent mental consciousness upward to all that is above mind. After a time one feels the consciousness rising upward and in the end it rises beyond the lid which has so long kept it tied in the body and finds a

centre above the head where it is liberated into the Infinite. There it begins to come into contact with the universal Self, the Divine Peace, Light, Power, Knowledge, Bliss, to enter into that and become that, to feel the descent of these things into the nature. To concentrate in the head with the aspiration for quietude in the mind and the realisation of the Self and Divine above is the second way of concentration

The other side of discipline is with regard to the activities of the nature, of the mind, of the life-self or vital, of the physical being. Here the principle is to accord the nature with the inner realisation so that one may not be divided into two discordant parts. There are here several disciplines or processes possible. One is to offer all the activities to the Divine and call for the inner guidance and the taking up of one's nature by a Higher Power. If there is the inward soul-opening, if the psychic being comes forward, then there is no great difficulty—there comes with it a psychic discrimination, a constant intimation, finally a governance which discloses and quietly and patiently removes all imperfections, brings the right mental and vital movements and reshapes the physical consciousness also.

Another method is to stand back detached from the movements of the mind, life, physical being, to regard their activities as only a habitual formation of general Nature in the individual imposed on us by past workings, not as any part of our real being; in proportion as one succeeds in this, becomes detached, sees mind and its activities as not oneself, life and its activities as not oneself, the body and its activities as not oneself, one becomes aware of an inner Being within us—inner mental, inner vital, inner physical—silent, calm, unbound, unattached which reflects the true Self above and can be its direct representative; from this inner silent Being proceeds a rejection of all that is to be rejected, an acceptance only of what can be kept and transformed, an inmost Will to perfection or a call to the Divine Pow-

er to do at each step what is necessary for the change of the Nature. It can also open mind, life and body to the inmost psychic entity and its guiding influence or its direct guidance. In most cases these two methods emerge and work together and finally fuse into one. But one can begin with either, the one that one feels most natural and easy to follow.

Finally, in all difficulties where personal effort is hampered, the help of the Teacher can intervene and bring about what is needed for the realization or for the immediate step that is necessary.

New letters on yoga

*The following letters were posted to Auroconf, an e-mail discussion group about Integral Yoga. To subscribe, send e-mail to auroconf-request@aurobindo.org. Leave the subject line blank. In the body of the message, type **subscribe auroconf**.*

Walking sadhana

Some people on Auroconf send personal experiences; others prefer to keep the discussion on a more impersonal level.

Like many others, I am hesitant to post personal experiences, but I am yielding with a small experience that is not too threatening for me, just to test the waters. I am also interested in bringing the work into my own life successfully for me and for others.

For the last two years, since a debilitating illness, I have had very weak legs. I am seventy-eight and just couldn't seem to get the strength I needed for walking. Of course the outer world said, "Oh, Marge, don't expect too much; after all, look at your age."

Well, that was not acceptable to me. For a long time, I groaned every time I tried to clean a cupboard or walk in a



store doing my shopping, but lately, since reading *Questions and Answers* for 1956–57, I have hit upon a new way. Perhaps this weakness is an invitation to strength.

I have started, following a suggestion of Mother's, always to walk with the consciousness of Mother's presence. Now I am remembering the Divine in my walking and my life is a perpetual joy. I don't know whether it will strengthen me or not, but the joy of the presence is changing me in a practical way and is helping me to remember.

—Marjorie Kass, joyline@eatel.net

A language of love

Don Salmon (virtreal@jps.net), who moderates an e-mail discussion group on integral psychology, often encourages others to share experiences. In the following letter, Marjorie continues her comments above, which started a brief discussion about surrender, and when to share.

I think we need a new language. I really support Don in his desire for us to share personal things, but it really is hard without the feeling of the heart and the oneness. For instance, how do we say in words that we feel we have surrendered? Anything that we put into words is already tainted with thoughts. When we are thinking, we are not surrendered. We are analyzing or judging or desiring or projecting. Only when we are just *being* are we surrendered.

Also, how sincere are we in our surrender? I had to face the fact months ago that I really wanted to walk as I did thirty years ago, and perhaps I was surrendering so that I could be healed. But that's not surrender. Now I am seeking to follow Mother when she says, "What you will, Lord, what you will."

So I move on, but hopefully, in the belief that there are those on this conference who will be brave and share their inmost thoughts, so that together we may grow closer and become really one.

It is a language of love that we need. And in this impersonal medium of e-mail, we need to be able to trust that the reader is listening with his/her heart also.

Only then can we really share and create this new language.

—Marjorie Kass, joyline@eatel.net

You are so right about the need to find a language of love. Without it, the most delicate feelings of the soul are difficult to express in words. They fall and wither like dry leaves before they reach the other.

I relate to what you say about surrender, the difficulty of honesty. I am lately painfully aware of the hidden, subtle bargains that live in many moments of mine. It does seem like an endless work to shine the light there to reach to some real giving up of my own expectations. I have found that often the real problem is pride, and springing from here, the many assumptions we have of "what I deserve," a certain entitlement. The Greeks called it hubris, and they knew that it was the one real transgression.

I think, though, that there can be surrender in the thinking function, which is closest to the ego—but the thinking has to be put in service of the spirit. I believe it is what Sri Aurobindo called the surrender of the mental.

I find my ego often trying to appropriate for itself what the soul learns, when it should be serving the grail of love and its truth.

—Alicia Torres, altorres@cantv.net

I have experienced, in various athletic activities, what I felt was surrender without consciously asking or deliberately going into a state of surrender. I feel that most of us have experienced this at one time or another.

In swimming, walking, running, tennis, or in most any sport, sometimes without one's programming or aspiring for it, there comes a feeling of floating, of effortlessness, of peace and calm, when all movements are done perfectly and without strain. It can last for varying time periods, from a minute or two to several minutes.

The problem is that the moment one becomes aware that one is in this effort-



The flower Mother called "Equanimity": "Equanimity is the stamp and seal of the divine consciousness. It is the essential condition of union and communion with the Divine." (Painting by Shiva Vangara)



lessness, this flow disappears, and thinking will not bring it back.

This may not be quite a yogic surrender, but it is certainly a feeling of flow.

—Janis Coker, janisfl@aol.com

Sharing experiences

The discussion about sharing experiences continued through several letters, where its pros and cons were amplified.

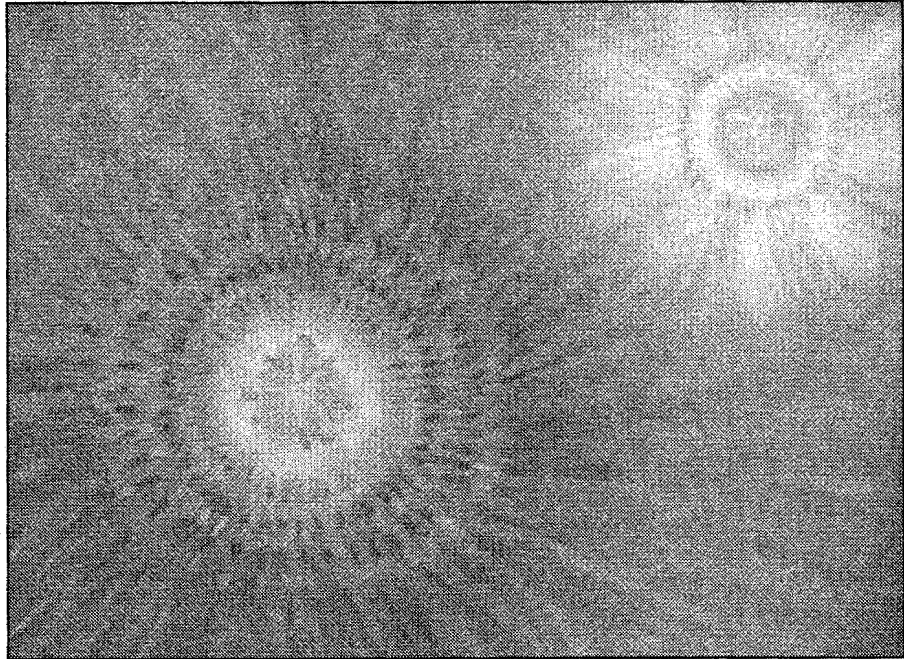
There was a warning about sharing and mentalizing experiences, yet it was also noted in the same passage that the more firm and stable an experience has become, the less problematic the sharing of it was. This distinction may need to be made.

In other words, if the experience is relatively easily recallable at will, then there is perhaps far less risk in the sharing of it. This makes sense logically as well, since one of the biggest threats to the experience is the doubt that can be fostered by others. This doubt is less likely to occur and develop if one can easily recall the experience.

For example, we all share the experience of our love and devotion to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother all the time on this forum, so much so that it may not even seem as if we are sharing an experience—but actually we are. This is an experience that is so deeply ingrained in us, so stable and secure, that it doesn't even seem like an experience, simply our natural state. Moreover, it is so natural to our normal state that it cannot be threatened or made doubtful by the comments of even the staunchest non-believer and mocker.

When an experience is truly secure, the comments of others, be they negative or positive, simply bring a smile, because it is we who know and understand the experience in our hearts.

The sharing of these types of stable experiences, it would seem, is a good thing because it encourages the develop-



*The flower Mother called "Silence": "In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power."
(Painting by Shiva Vangara)*

ment or resonates with a similar experience in others. Sharing the nonstable experience is risky to both the sharer and the listener, if unwarranted doubts are allowed to creep in to either or both.

—Ben Irvin irvinb@ix.netcom.com

When we have a new spiritual experience outside the normal mind, this new experience is like a little sapling that needs much protection and further growth before it can survive in the rough environment of daily life. On the other hand, it might be helpful to note down the experience after it is over, since the very nature of a nonmental experience makes it difficult to remember—similar to a dream. This assures us of the reality of the experience and reduces the doubts of our surface consciousness. Here the disadvantage of mentalizing is outweighed by the gains.

The real danger of mentalizing is when it is done while the experience lasts. However, once it is over, there is not much harm in noting it down.

Talking about it is another matter, since then we bring us into contact with

mental and vital clouds of disbelief and misunderstanding of our listeners. Those contacts may harm our little sapling of experience.

—Helmut Ernst,

Helmut.Uschi.Ernst@t-online.de

Staying young

Auroconf members may discuss figures who are not directly a part of the Integral Yoga. This letter followed an announcement of the death of writer and anthropologist Ashley Montagu, who passed away in December 1999.

Thanks for the information on Ashley Montagu. Since you describe his book, *Growing Young*, I thought it interesting to mention that the book actually begins with "Communication from a Flying Saucer," which is taken from a 1969 issue of *Equals One: The Journal of Auroville*.

Here is an excerpt from the piece that is interesting and, I believe, worth some thought:



"One earth." (Watercolor by Lynda Lester)

"The trouble with earthlings is their early adulthood. As long as they are young, they are lovable, open-hearted, tolerant, eager to learn and to collaborate. They can even be induced to play with one another. The only educational problem earth has is how to keep them young.

"For life, evolution, progress, and adaptation to new situations, [humans] are useful only as long as they keep their useful qualities. But the funny thing is that in all the educational institutions I visited, the object was to hasten maturity instead of delaying it.

"Surely your history can teach you that only the races with the longest childhood were able to remain in the cultural mainstream. The ideal should be to prolong childhood up to sixty years. Then you would be able to produce a real planetary culture . . .

"Compare the growth of intelligence in human children of, let us say, seven to fourteen, with that of children of fourteen to twenty-one. Do you see the dramatic slowdown the moment maturity appears? . . . And even those who go on evolving usually progress along lines already laid down at the age of ten or twelve. No new regions of mind normally open in human beings after that."

—From *Equals One: The Journal of Auroville*, 1969, no. 2

—Bhuvana Nandakumar, msbhuvana@hotmail.com

A new awakening

The following excerpt is from an article called "Desperately seeking spirituality" that appeared in *Psychology Today*, Nov./Dec. 1994. It was written by Eugene Taylor, director of the Cambridge Institute of Psychology and Religion.

The pundits of American high culture scorn much of what passes before us from the contemporary spiritual environment as superficial and of little consequence. But the generations just behind them have broken with the past and caught on to the deeper recesses of the new awakening, which contains the germ of an ethic capable of inspiring succeeding generations into the twenty-first century.

It is this: The doorway to ultimately transforming experience lies through an exploration of the personal unconscious; alternate states of consciousness from pathological to transcendent do, indeed, exist within us. Science is a tool and not an end; all the measurements and computers in the world cannot replace the mystery of the person. Higher consciousness is a viable inward reality. The experience of it changes people for the better. Transcendent experiences present us with the challenge of actualizing their effects in the outer world to improve the moral and aesthetic quality of our lives . . .

Social theorist Theodore Rozak maintains that all the popular interest in the marvelous is the unfolding of an authentic spiritual quest, and a transformation of human personality of evolutionary proportions is in progress. "We stand in witness," he says, "to a planet-wide mutation of mind which promises to liberate energies of will and resources of vision long maturing in the depths of our identity."

Until now, only the fantasies of surrealist imagination in our art, song, and

literature have been able to embrace the dimensions of such a cultural transition. Now, the popular mythology of evolving consciousness more and more echoes another, far older myth, a story of redemption and transcendence that carries us back to the dawn of religious awareness. "Take the myth at its full value, and it reminds us of the task that has been laid upon us as nature's uniquely self-creating, self-defining species: to discover the godlikeness in whose image we are said to have been cast."

We are nothing less than unfinished animals, he reminds us, summoned to unfold astonishing possibilities.

Mother on Y2K America

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, but a more widespread movement in America . . .

They are silly, silly! They are absolutely ignorant and yet . . . there's a flame of aspiration suddenly awakening. And then they want to know, want to investigate, want to find, want to learn, want to . . . It's going like this (*Mother blinks her eyes like a baby bird waking up*), vibrating and searching . . .

All this is for the next hundred years. There are going to be some changes . . .

Well, yes, in 2000 things will take a clear direction—*Mother's Agenda*, vol. 3, 14 July 1962, pp. 260-261



Current affairs

AUM 2000 to be held in Connecticut

"Bridge to the new millennium"

by Julian Lines

The All USA Meeting (AUM) will be held this year from 5–9 July in West Cornwall, Connecticut. The conference title is *The Bridge*, referring to the breadth of Sri Aurobindo's vision and how it can be a bridge to the future. The theme also refers to the communion of all spiritual paths and how we can communicate what is most essential, bridging the differences.

Conference site and agenda

The conference site is Trinity Conference Center, 100 miles north of New York City. The center is located in the northwest corner of Connecticut on the outskirts of West Cornwall, a tiny village situated on the banks of the Housatonic River in Litchfield County.

Trinity Conference Center is sublimely beautiful and ecologically pure and clean. Central air conditioning in the center will be available for the conference.

In the village, a five-minute walk away, are three restaurants, a bookshop, a post office, and a few shops. Excursions planned include group walking tours on the Appalachian Trail, canoe rides down the river (at extra charge), a garden tour in Cornwall, ultimate frisbee, tennis, and swimming.

The conference agenda will include hatha yoga, meditative movement, and shared readings of *Savitri*. Massage therapists will be available at extra cost. A concentrated emphasis on group networking for the American pavilion in Auroville is also planned.

Transportation

The closest airport is Bradley International, north of Hartford, Connecticut, about an hour and ten minutes away. No public transportation is available to and from the center, but a midday and evening shuttle will be arranged for Friday and Sunday.

New York airports require more complicated service via Connecticut Limousine to Danbury and a forty-five minute drive to West Cornwall. Driving time from New York City is approximately two hours and ten minutes; Stewart and Newark airports are within three hours' driving time.

Bonanza bus service from Port Authority Terminal in New York City goes to Cornwall Bridge; West Cornwall is seven minutes north.



Verne Henshall extends an invitation to AUM 2000 in West Cornwall, Connecticut. (Photo by Lynda Lester; AUM banner sewn by Marta Belén.)

Cost and contact information

Cost will be approximately \$345 per person for the entire conference. This includes a shared room (double, two persons per room), meals, and transportation from Bradley International Airport on Friday and Sunday. For a single room the conference is \$100 more, for a total of \$445. (Only six singles are available.) The daily rate including lunch, snack, and dinner is \$60 per person.

For updated information about AUM 2000, please see <http://www.matagiri.org/events.htm> or <http://www.collaboration.org/aum/2000/intro.html>; or contact Julian Lines (address: 1183 Wittenberg Road, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457; phone: 914-679-5358; e-mail: jhl@aol.com).

Julian Lines runs the Pondicherry gift shop in Woodstock, New York, and serves on the board of Auroville International USA. He may be reached at jhl@aol.com.



All-India Meet 2000 set for June

Around the world, human society is going through an unprecedented disintegration in values at all levels; there seems to be an evolutionary crisis. Yet those who have faith in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo know this to be only the darkness before the golden dawn. They are also confident that India can take a lead in finding a solution to this crisis in the light of her ancient spiritual knowledge and strength—but she must first recover the truths in herself and put them into action.

Sri Aurobindo has not only reawakened the dormant soul of India, but has given her a new vision and the needed consciousness and force for its realization. This new vision must be realized not only in the life of individuals, but also in the collectivity; not only in spiritual centers, but also in our national life as a whole.

At this important moment in history, when we are stepping into the next millennium, the forces, individuals, and groups who are aligned to the vision and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could come together and begin the century in a cohesive and cooperative spirit. Such a meeting could help us not only to introspect, share, and meditate on the collective goal of the centers and the individuals working in their light, but also to consolidate our efforts, talents, and resources. We would therefore like to enlist your active participation in this effort to bring together the Mother's torchbearers of the future.

We are organizing the first annual All-India Meet 2000 (AIM 2000) at Van Niwas, Nainital, Uttar Pradesh, from 19–26 June 2000. The conference will last for four days, followed by an optional three days of sight-seeing. There will be a variety of activities through which we can form a closer bond of mutual friendship: thematic presentations by keynote speakers, panel discussions, presentations by centers and individuals, meditations, bhajans, and trekking.

If you are interested in participating in this national and international confluence of hearts and minds and making use of this opportunity to renew commitment to their collective work, please fill in the registration form at <http://www.miraura.org/event/ev-ind/AIM2000.PDF> and return it as soon as possible to the address listed at the end of this article.

This meeting will be hosted by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch, and organized by the coordinating group consisting of the following:

- Tara Jauhar, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch, New Delhi (e-mail: snsdl@del2.vsnl.net.in)
- Vijay Poddar, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry (e-mail: sasocyt@vsnl.com)
- Raj Vasishtha, Sri Aurobindo Memorial School, Bangalore (e-mail: rajrishi@operamail.com)
- Kosha Shah, Sri Aurobindo Research Foundation, Baroda (e-mail: sarf@vsnl.com)

- Ameeta Mehra, The Gnostic Centre, New Delhi (e-mail: ameeta@giasdl01.vsnl.net.in)
- Ananda Reddy, Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Pondicherry (e-mail: sacar@giasmd01.vsnl.net.in)

We look forward to your joyous cooperation in this pioneering effort of AIM 2000. Some considerations if you are interested in attending:

1. Have you written a research paper or article? If so, please enclose a copy. If not, let us know what area of work you have been involved in or would like to be involved in.
2. AIM 2000 is dependent on the goodwill and financial contribution of all its participants. As there is no source of funding for AIM, each participant and resource person will be required to bear the following expenses:
 - Travel expenses to Delhi and back
 - Bus/train fare from Delhi to Nainital and back to Delhi
 - Sightseeing expenses in and around Nainital
3. Board and lodging at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch, will be provided on 18 June, the day of arrival in Delhi, and on 27 June, the day of departure from Delhi. The AIM 2000 conference itself as well as board and lodging at Nainital will be hosted free of charge by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch.
4. Working knowledge of English is required.
5. The number of participants in AIM 2000 will be limited. Therefore you are requested to send in your registration form as soon as possible.

For more information, contact Raj Vasishtha (phone: 91-80-671-6666 or 671-7777; fax: 91-80-671-9898; address: Sri Aurobindo Memorial School, 13-A Main, 22 Cross, Banashankari 2nd Stage, Bangalore 560 070, India).

—AIM Coordinating Group

Visitors from India to come to U.S.

Professor Mangesh Nadkarni

A respected scholar from India, professor Mangesh Nadkarni has a master's degree in English literature from Poona University and a doctorate in linguistics from the University of California at Los Angeles. He taught linguistics for twelve years in Hyderabad and for eight years in Singapore, and has specialized in the study of Sri Aurobindo's writings, with special focus on the epic poem *Savitri*. Professor Nadkarni has given a number of workshops at



the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and has led retreat camps and lectured extensively abroad. He has contributed a number of papers on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and vision in journals devoted to this discipline and is author of the following monographs: *A Brief Introduction to Savitri*, *Problems of Human Unity in Sri Aurobindo's Light*, and *Hindu-Muslim Unity in Sri Aurobindo's Light*

The professor will be touring the U.S. on these tentative dates:

- 10 April** Arrival
- 21–23 April** Mt. Tremper, New York (Matagiri) for darshan
- 12 May** Baltimore, Maryland/Washington, DC
- 24–30 May** North Carolina (Sri Aurobindo Center Southeast and Nature's Spirit)
- 31 May–5 June** Seattle, Washington
- 6–10 June** Lodi, California (Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham)
- 11–20 June** San Francisco, California
- 20–25 June** Los Angeles, California
- 25–29 June** Albuquerque, New Mexico
- 5–9 July** West Cornwall, Connecticut (All USA Meeting)

For more information, contact Julian Lines (e-mail: jhl@aol.com; phone: 914-679-5358; address: 1183 Wittenberg Road, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457).

Georges Van Vrekhem

Georges Van Vrekhem is a Flemish-speaking Belgian who has lived in India since 1970. His first eight years there were spent in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, and since then he has lived in Auroville. He has translated books by and about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into Dutch.

Last year his important book on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, *Beyond the Human Species: The Life and Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, was published in the United States. In a review of this book in *Mother India*, Carl Thieme wrote:

“While reading, one starts to realize how much outward facts are determined by interventions from other levels of consciousness, for which those facts are only the external appearances and signs. The writer has presented us the biographical material in this context, for instance when explaining Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's occult action on world events. The inclusion of interesting historical, philosophical, and spiritual vistas drawn from other sources has resulted in a richly embroidered tapestry as a background to the exceptional life of the two-in-one, the ‘double-poled Avatar of the Supermind’ as Van Vrekhem calls Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.”

Georges' latest book is due to be published this year. It is a

biography on the Mother, tentatively titled *The Mother: The Story of Her Life*.

Georges' itinerary has not yet been decided. He will tentatively arrive in the United States around mid-June and attend the All-USA Meeting (AUM) in early July. He says he is looking forward to meeting his friends there again.

For more information, contact Julian Lines (e-mail: jhl@aol.com; phone: 914-679-5358; address: 1183 Wittenberg Road, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457).

Alan Herbert and Annemarie Bakker

Alan Herbert and Annemarie Bakker will be coming to the United States in summer 2000 as guests of the Sri Aurobindo Association. Annemarie went to Auroville in 1975, Alan in 1979. Annemarie worked for many years on Matrimandir and in the Entry Group, Alan in Greenwork. Since 1988 they have been part of the *Auroville Today* editorial team, which, as Alan writes, “through a semimiraculous process still not fully understood, manages to bring out *Auroville Today* every month.”

Auroville Today covers a wide variety of topics, including spirituality, the environment, village development, architecture, the economy, business, culture, youth, education, community organization, renewable energy, and community building. Recent issues of the journal have focused on the housing crisis, steps towards a spiritual economy, and an examination of the effect upon the community of Auroville becoming a tourist attraction.

Alan and Annemarie's itinerary has not yet been decided. They will tentatively arrive in the U.S. around late June, attend the All-USA Meeting (AUM) in early July, and then stay another four weeks.

For more information, contact David Hutchinson (e-mail: dbhutchinson@ucdavis.edu; address: P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816).

News

Matagiri hosts integral psychology conference

A conference on integral psychology was held at Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, Mt. Tremper, New York, on 16–17 October 1999. Matthijs Cornelissen and Soumitra Basu from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram were among the conference attendees.

Larry Seidlitz (l.seidlitz@worldnet.att.net) writes, “There were many wonderful contributions from each of the participants, and many soulful moments in which it became crystal



clear that integral psychology is practiced from within, preferably when centered in one's psychic being. Matthijs gave a wonderful presentation on the epistemology of integral psychology, and Soumitra Basu gave a dynamic presentation that covered the many planes and parts of the being, and the maladaptive behaviors that can be associated with them.

"There were insights on healing and channeling Mother's force, as well as on Jungian psychology and its relations and correlations with integral psychology. Deep group meditations and collective aspirations rounded out the conference, as well as music and movement, excellent Indian cuisine, and beautiful hikes up the mountain. There was much openness and sharing and respectful interchange in the group meetings, and also time and opportunity for more personal meetings and exchange. It was an excellent conference."

For more information on integral psychology, please contact Don Salmon (e-mail: virtreal@jps.net) or see the Web site at <http://www.jps.net/virtreal/psyche.html>.

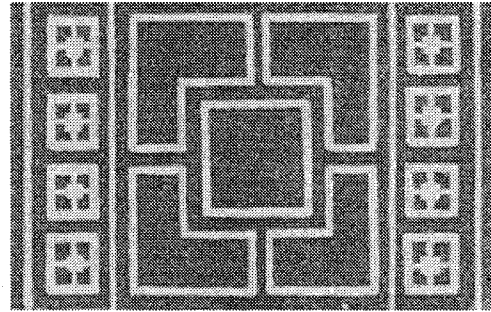
Shah attends Parliament of World Religions in Africa

Kosha Shah attended the 1999 Parliament of World Religions in Cape Town, South Africa, from 1–8 December with the help of a grant from the Sri Aurobindo Association. Kosha gave a presentation on "Spirituality and Social Change."

She writes: "The highlight of the event for me was the assembly where some 300 people were invited to deliberate upon how religion and spirituality could collaborate with the guiding institutions of society such as government, international organizations, media, and business. Over a period of three days, small groups kept changing, getting more focused, exchanged ideas, and eventually tried to come up with projects for each person or group of persons."

Nandakumar joins board of Sri Aurobindo Association

Bhuvana Nandakumar became a board member of the Sri Aurobindo Association in August 1999. Her grandfather, K.R.S. Iyengar, is the author of the definitive biography of Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*. Bhuvana has been associated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi branch, and its sister institutions since 1990. She attended her first All USA Meeting (AUM) in 1999, and currently lives with her husband Suresh Krishna in Cleveland, Ohio, where she is pursuing a graduate degree in management of nonprofit organizations. She can be reached at msbhuvana@hotmail.com.



Stencil pattern from Pedro J. Lemos' *Applied Art* (Pacific Press: 1920), a book for art students, teachers, and parents.

Urban planners meet in Auroville

A conference on urban and rural development was held in Auroville in August 1999, bringing together Central, Tamil Nadu, and Pondicherry officials with Auroville planners. Mr. V. Suresh, chair of the Housing and Urban Development Corporation, noted that thirty-three percent of India's population, or 330 million people, now live in urban centers. The meeting was also attended by T.T. Joseph (Pondicherry's chief secretary) and Sri N. Bala Baskar (secretary of the Auroville Foundation).

Briefs

- Jean Korstange took on the role of secretary for the Foundation for World Education in 1999. Correspondence with the foundation should now be addressed to Jean Korstange, P.O. Box 297, Saxtons River, VT 05154.
- A video of the Mother's last darshan (in April 1973) is available on the Web at <http://www.mysticfire.com/ntsc/archives/mother/mother.html>. The file size is 4.3 megabytes, which takes about 10–15 minutes to come through on a normal modem. It also requires the Quicktime plugin, available for free on the Internet.
- A searchable version of the *Agenda* can be found on the Web at <http://mother.freesevers.com>.
- A report on the fourteenth annual Auroville International Meeting, held from 6–9 July 1999, can be found at <http://www.cam.org/~avica/plzreport.html>.
- *Auroville News* is available for downloading from the Web at <http://www.auroville.org/whatsnew/journals/avnewsfr.html>.
- *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, by A.B. Purani, is available on the Web at http://members.tripod.com/%7Eneuro_net/evetlksa.htm.
- The Cultural Integration Fellowship Web site has a new look and a new URL: <http://www.culturalintegration.org>.



Center to center

Contributions sought for Orissa cyclone relief effort

Integral Yoga centers damaged

by *Dakshina Vanzetti*

On 28–29 October 1999, a cyclone swept into the Indian state of Orissa, leaving unimaginable devastation in its wake. It has been estimated that up to fifteen million people (out of a total population of thirty-one million) were left homeless, and thousands died. Orissa is primarily agricultural, and the cyclone hit at the peak of the harvest. A local newspaper reports “lakhs [hundreds of thousands] of head of cattle have been wiped out. Further, standing crops for miles on end, almost ready for harvest, have been razed to the ground.”

What is less well known is that Orissa is a major center for work in the Integral Yoga. Below are several first-hand accounts of the damage, and addresses where relief funds can be sent. Rebuilding the centers will probably take years, perhaps a decade. One center alone (Sri Aurobindo Srikshetra Trust) reports more than \$700,000 in damage.

A sadhika in Orissa writes:

“The extent of the damage done to the Mother’s work there in Orissa is unbelievable. It is just as if the hostile forces wanted to wipe out everything. Orissa, I have no doubt, is marching in front on our long way towards a divine life here on earth. One can only understand if one has seen it, and then one immediately knows why Mother said that Orissa people have a special subliminal opening to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

“You will see Mother’s photo everywhere; there are schools and centers and study circles even in the remotest pockets. All in all there are about forty-seven

relics centers, thousands of study circles, maybe more than 150 schools . . .

“There is a yearly medical conference, engineering conference, women’s conference. Everything over a few days with lectures and panel discussions in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s message and in view of the practical work that needs to be done. Words cannot describe. It is as if another world has already started there.

“More than half of all these centers and schools are situated within that devastated area—all the main centers like Cuttack (Matrubhavan), Bhuvaneshwar, and Dalijora. Everything smashed. In Cuttack alone, the damage done to only the stock of books and materials kept in their store is about Rs. 200,000 [\$5,000]. This does not include the damage done to the buildings, which were under seven feet of water. The destruction in Dalijora was given as seventy-five percent.”

A relative of a devotee in Pondicherry gave the following account from Rajpur village:

“There are no houses or trees as far as one can see. Except for two structures, everything is flattened. There are

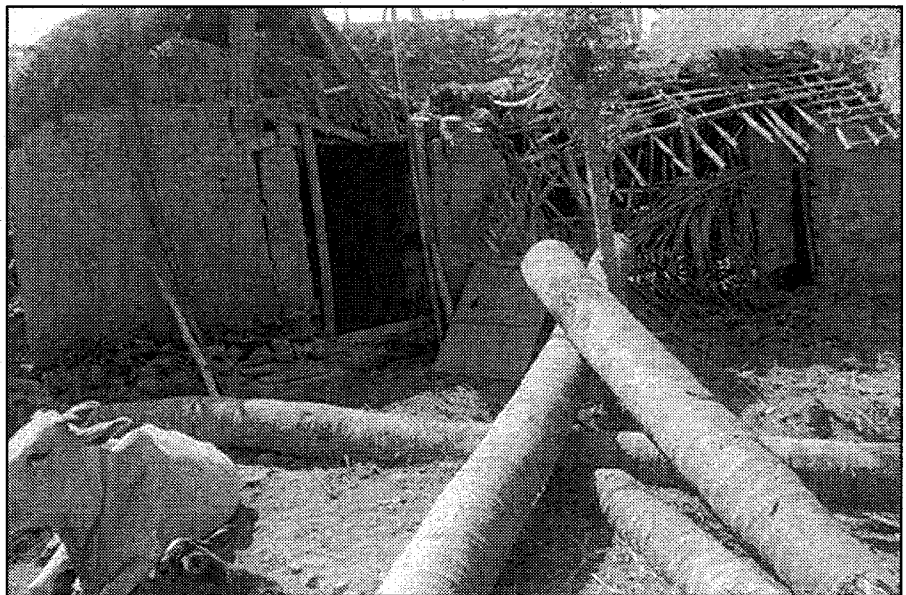
about seventy people living in one of the remaining houses. Daytime they leave the house to search in the mud for any belongings that might still be buried there. The sun is burning down after this rain with renewed fury. No shade anywhere.

“In the Relics Center, several hundred people are living and searching through the mud during the unbearable daylight sun. The center is damaged, sunshades and parapets have collapsed, the compound wall has collapsed. People are getting relief rations, but are without hope. I saw people eating their food just next to a dead corpse which had come up from the surrounding waters. There is a stink in the air due to the decomposing bodies and carcasses around. No electricity, which will not come for months.

“Many villages still cannot be reached unless you wade through water and crawl through fallen trees and conquer the mud all around. It is like a living hell.”

The report continues from Orissa:

“As soon as possible, we are going to document the damage done to the centers and schools. At the moment it is



Cyclone damage in Orissa. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham)



not very safe to go. Many relief trucks are being attacked by hungry and angry crowds, and there is great danger of epidemics. From many centers we have not got any news. We only know that many places do not exist anymore at all. Whole villages have disappeared.

“Matrugram, one big farm from where the Ashram dining hall receives vegetables, is washed away completely . . . Money is needed in thousands and more, in order to truly make a difference. There will be international food supply, there will be grants and government housing funds, all kinds of social help will pour in (though that also will not reach everybody, since millions are affected), but there will be no help to rebuild the Mother’s work. Here also funds are needed, lakhs and lakhs of rupees [100,000 rupees = approximately \$3,300]. From where it will come?”

Where to send money or supplies

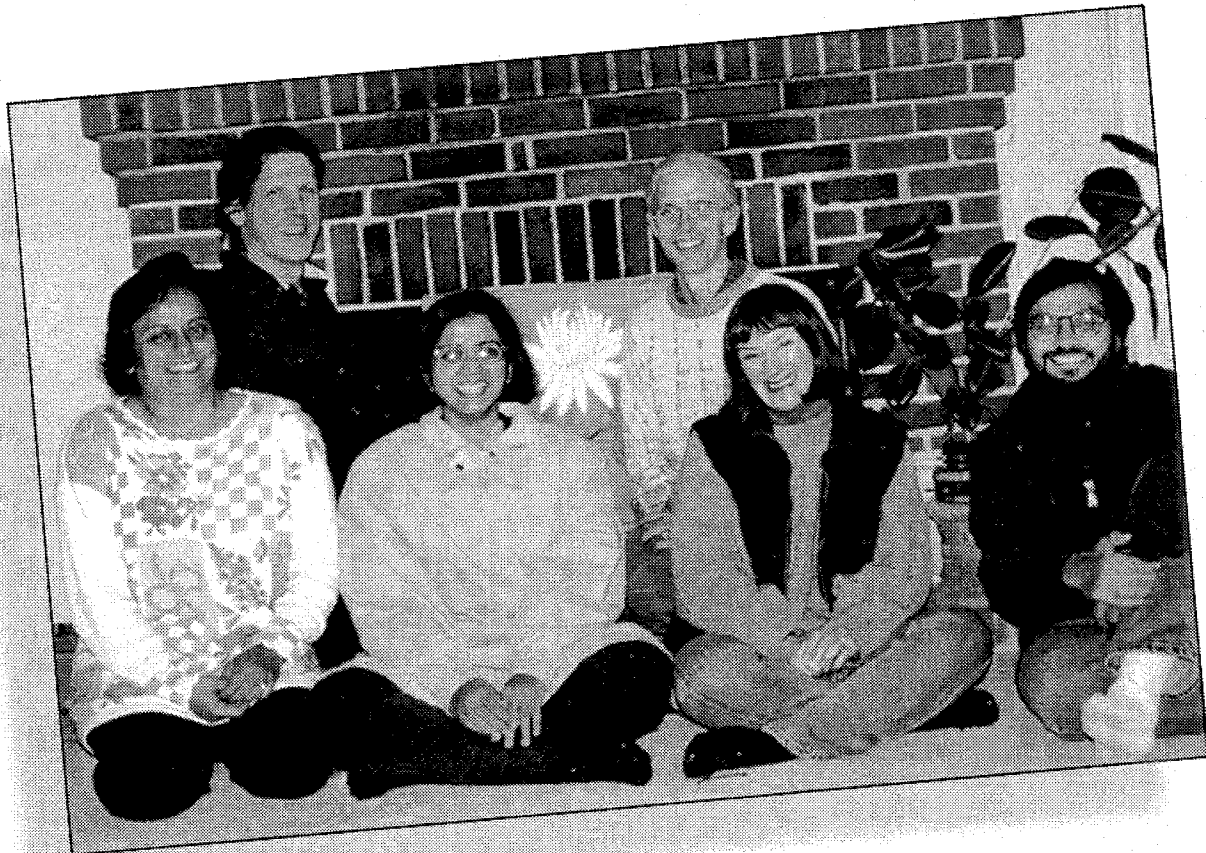
Within the United States: Donations may be sent to Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP), 2621 W. Hwy. 12, Lodi, CA 95242. Please specify that the money be earmarked for the Orissa Relief Fund. We are forwarding funds in regular

installments to Auro Seva Trust, the sister organization for SASP in Pondicherry, which is organizing a relief fund to focus on the rebuilding of the centers and schools in Orissa. (All donations sent this way are tax deductible).

You can call SASP at 209-339-1342 ext.5, if you have any questions. Please, generous donations are needed to help in this time of crisis for so many of Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s children.

Within India: Please send your checks for the Orissa Cyclone Relief Fund to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch, c/o the Sri Aurobindo Education Society, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi 110016, India. Receipts will be issued for each donation, which will be exempt from India income tax under 80 G. All the money collected will go directly and without delay to the affected people. You can also send contributions of clothing—new and used, fit for immediate use, as well as kitchen utensils.

Dakshina Vanzetti is an artist, ballet dancer, and resident of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, California. She may be reached at sasp@lodinet.com



Sri Aurobindo Association board members, L to R: Kalpana Patel, Vishnu Eschner, Bhuvana Nandakumar, David Hutchinson, Lynda Lester. Not pictured: Marta Belén. (Photo by Dakshina Vanzetti)



Sri Aurobindo Association financial report

1 January–29 December 1999

by Marta Belén

RECEIPTS \$81,970.71

Donations \$75,734.52

Sri Aurobindo Association	\$ 6,177.90
Sri Aurobindo Ashram	\$56,110.72
Auroville	\$ 9,760.32
Matrimandir	\$ 112.50
Money Power Project	\$ 2,400.00
Sri Aurobindo centers	\$1,173.08
Sri Aurobindo Saranam	\$702.76
Sri Aurobindo Research Fdn.	\$226.66
Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham	\$243.66

AUM 1999 loan repaid \$ 2,500.00

Interest income on certificate of deposit \$ 121.84

Collaboration \$ 3,465.00

Patrons	\$1,330.00
Subscriptions	\$2,135.00

Refund for Collaboration printing error \$ 149.35

EXPENSES \$87,112.38

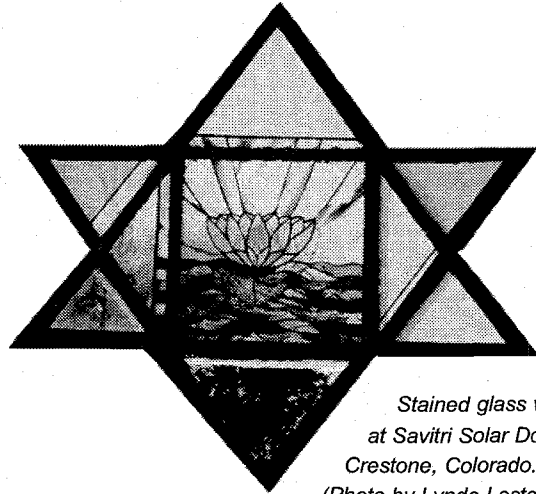
Donations \$71,854.42

Sri Aurobindo Ashram	\$ 51,403.42
Auroville	\$ 17,816.92
Matrimandir	\$ 597.85
Sri Aurobindo centers	\$ 2,036.23
Sri Aurobindo Saranam	\$ 324.25
Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham ...	\$ 425.31
Sri Aurobindo Research Fdn.	\$1,045.00
Gnostic Center	\$ 150.00
Agenda translation	\$ 91.67

Money-Power investment \$ 2,400.00

AUM 1999 \$ 3,539.58

Loan	\$ 2,500.00
Publicity	\$ 576.68
Supplies	\$ 12.90
Travel	\$ 450.00



*Stained glass window
at Savitri Solar Dome,
Crestone, Colorado.
(Photo by Lynda Lester)*

Collaboration \$ 2,892.73

Printing	\$ 1,977.71
Postage and delivery	\$ 915.02

Computer \$ 4,020.85

Domain name	\$ 35.00
Hardware	\$ 3,226.75
Software	\$ 363.10
Web site	\$ 396.00

Sri Aurobindo Association \$ 2,404.80

Box rental	\$ 64.00
Postage	\$ 700.42
Telephone	\$ 199.13
Publicity	\$ 15.62
Board meetings	\$ 907.64
Travel	\$ 814.00
Dining	\$ 93.64
Office supplies	\$ 383.90
Legal filing fees	\$ 10.00
Bank wire transfer fees	\$ 124.09

EXPENSES OVER RECEIPTS - \$ 5,141.67

BALANCES AS OF 29 DECEMBER 1999

Checking account \$11,899.97

Certificate of Deposit \$ 5,121.84

Money Power Investment \$16,265.17

Marta Belén is treasurer of the Sri Aurobindo Association. She coaches young musicians in stage performance and is an accompanist for numerous musical ensembles in Sacramento, California. She may be reached at mbelen@NewWindpub.com.



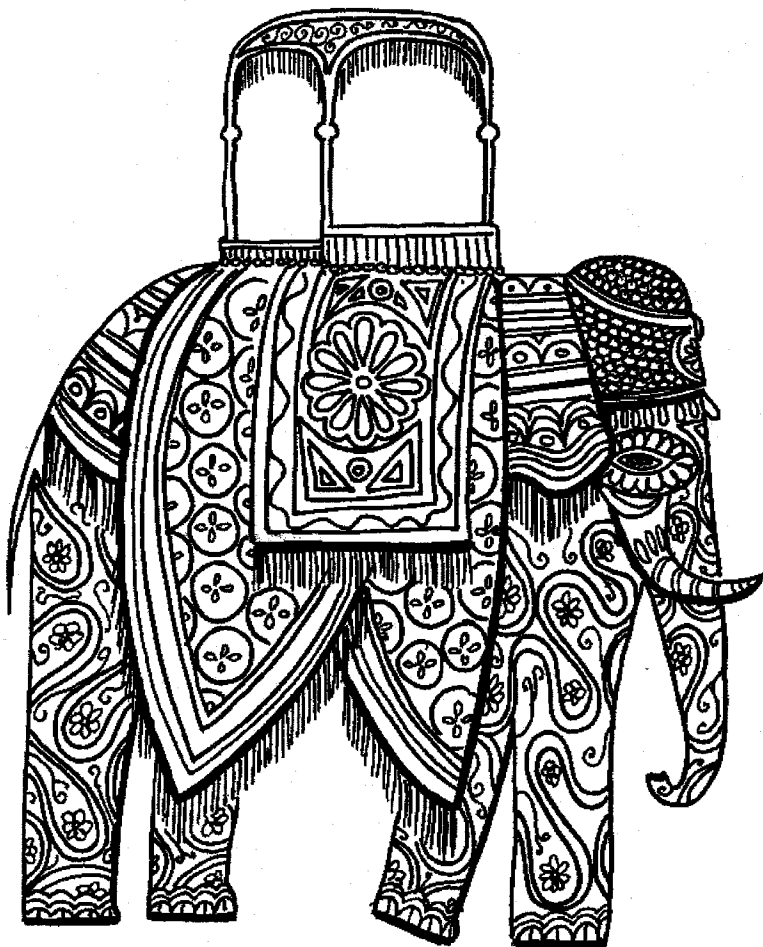
Auroville almanac

The abode of Savitri

A report from Savitri Bhavan

by Shraddhavan (A.M. Stuttle)

We dream of an environment in Auroville that will breathe the atmosphere of *Savitri*;
 That will welcome *Savitri* lovers from every corner of the world;
 That will be an inspiring center of *Savitri* studies;
 That will house all kinds of materials and activities to enrich our understanding and enjoyment of Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic;
 That will be the abode of *Savitri*, the Truth that has come from the Sun.
 —From the charter of Savitri Bhavan



"The elephant is strength—sometimes strength illumined with wisdom."
 —Sri Aurobindo. (Ink drawing by Elizabeth English)

Regular group readings of *Savitri* have been going on in Auroville for many years. Savitri Bhavan is a project of the Auroville *Savitri* study circle, which came into existence in November 1994. The study circle met on Sunday mornings to read and study Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic together, using different locations for a year. Then Nirodbaran, Sri Aurobindo's scribe for *Savitri*, inaugurated the Savitri Bhavan on 24 November 1995 by laying the foundation stone and invoking the blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for the project.

Nirod said, "I congratulate those lovers of Sri Aurobindo's immortal epic *Savitri* who have conceived the idea of having a building here, the Savitri Bhavan. It is a pioneer attempt, started here before anywhere else, so far as I know.

"This Savitri Bhavan project, now in its infant stage, is, if I may say so, a twin to the Matrimandir. The Matrimandir is much further developed and already showing some of its future glory; this new project has a great potential and will be growing up to an extent we cannot easily foresee. I consider myself fortunate to have been asked to lay its foundation stone."

Savitri Bhavan is located on a beautiful site between the Bharat Nivas and Matrimandir. It is envisioned as a place where all kinds of materials for study, research, and concentration on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* can be gathered together and made available, an area that breathes the atmosphere of *Savitri*, that can truly become the abode of *Savitri*—as the Mother said, "the Truth that has come from the Sun."

By November 1996, Helmut Schmidt, an Auroville architect, had a concept design and model of a 650-square-meter complex with storage and study areas, a garden, a library, a meeting hall, exhibition spaces, and a small outdoor amphitheater for music, dance, and drama performances. By December 1998, construction was started on the first phase of the complex, a 140-square-meter section designed to provide a multipurpose hall, office space, and secure storage.

Meanwhile our activities have been going on, first under a grove of teak and work-trees around the spot of the foundation stone, and since July 1998 in a pleasant keet-roofed shelter nearby. Since August 1998, there have been monthly visits from guest speakers such as Professor Arabinda Basu, Sradhalu Ranade, R. Y. Deshpande, and Ananda Reddy from the Ashram, as well as Richard Hartz of the Sri



Aurobindo Archives. Richard gave us a fascinating outline of the chronology of Sri Aurobindo's composition of *Savitri*.

Another speaker was Aurovilian Georges Van Vrekhem, author of the highly acclaimed study of the life and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, *Beyond Man* [published in the United States as *Beyond the Human Species*]. Former Aurovilian Rod Hemsell gave two powerful series of *Savitri* readings during an extended visit.

In February 1999, Dr. Gerd Kissell, music professor and *surbahar* adept, gave a candlelit recital of contemplative music one evening under the trees. (The *surbahar* is a stringed instrument similar to a sitar.)

Audio and video recordings were made of all these events, and edited versions of the talks are being published in the free quarterly magazine *Invocation: Study Notes and Newsletter of Savitri Bhavan*.

Over the last year, the *Savitri Bhavan* team has organized two exhibitions. In November 1998 a few of the Mother's *Savitri* sketches were exhibited in Pitanga Hall. These sketches were made while the Mother was working with Huta on the series of paintings named *Meditations on Savitri*. The *bhavan* has made computer scans of the 400-odd drawings made by the Mother during the course of this project, which is an important addition to our resources. About thirty of these were reproduced for display alongside the corresponding passages from *Savitri* and prints of Huta's paintings.

In February 1999 there was an exhibition of reproductions of Huta's paintings that focused on *About Savitri*, the Mother's explanations of Sri Aurobindo's poem. In addition to exhibiting the texts of the Mother's talks on book 1, canto 1, we were able to play for the first time in public the original recordings made by Huta of these talks of the Mother, accompanied by slides of the corresponding paintings.

All these activities, along with a

growing range of background courses, give a foretaste of what the life of *Savitri Bhavan* will be as it grows.

On 18 April 1999, just a few days before his ninety-third birthday, Udar Pinto from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram fulfilled our wish for a visit, delighting a good-sized audience from Auroville and Pondicherry with his anecdotes and *Savitri* recitations. He shared with us what the Mother had told him: "*Savitri* is a mantra for the transformation of the world."

The Mother asked Udar to devote his life to *Savitri*, and since then he has been reading and reciting daily with a group in the Ashram. He is also one of the few, apart from Nirod, to have heard Sri Aurobindo himself dictating *Savitri*. Since he was in charge of polishing the furniture in Sri Aurobindo's room, sometimes Udar was present during the dictation sessions. He led us through *Savitri*, reciting selected passages and explained why he had chosen them, culminating with the wonderful passage in book 11 which, he explained, has the power of manifesting the Mother's concrete presence.

As it happened, on this same day Kireet Joshi, recently appointed chair of the governing board of the Auroville Foundation, was in Auroville for the first time after many years. Informed that Udar was at *Savitri Bhavan*, Kireet made space in his heavy program and passed by for a few minutes to meet him. This made 18 April a doubly special occasion, and a promising beginning for the coming year of inner and outer growth and development at *Savitri Bhavan*.

Shraddhavan is an Englishwoman who has lived in Auroville since 1970, and whose name was given to her by the Mother in June 1972. She works as an educator, translator, and editor, and has been involved in the Savitri Bhavan project since 1994 as secretary/coordinator. Savitri Bhavan is a project of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER). For more information or a free copy of Invocation, contact Savitri Bhavan, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

Blackness and light

Diwali concert in Pitanga

by Mauna van der Vlugt

This letter was posted to the Auroville International (AVI) e-mail discussion group.

I write this to you from the UPS [uninterruptable power supply] at the Bharat Nivas AV International desk (and not, as usually, from my home in Grace), since recent rain and storms have, once again, catapulted us into a period without power.

We're getting used to these sudden and violent storm attacks, whipping up leaves and branches and making them dance high up while black skies threaten to fall upon us—those moments being intense and real and extremely beautiful. If it weren't for the knowledge of the thousands of homeless victims presently suffering in Orissa, one could almost enjoy it.

And our mornings break open in pure gold.

It was because of the same power cut that we enjoyed a candlelight concert in Pitanga last night. Those of you who happen to have an Auroville calendar this year may enjoy the image of Aurovilian Carel playing the piano in Pitanga. By chance that's just what we saw last night when listening to him accompanying violinist madame Galina Heifetz, a Russia-born, well-known artist from New York.

The two had been practicing during the last ten days and the interplay between violin and piano was sensitive, taut, and remarkable.

The two treated us to little treasures—some more, some less known—from Handel, Rachmaninoff, Khachaturian, Gliere, Zimbalist, Delius, Massenet and Sarasate, and the audience was receptive and grateful.

Perhaps it was because of the can-



dleight and hence the dimming of the more personal features of the performance that Madame Galina's control of her instrument (oneness with it?) and her depth of expression could deliver us so directly and naturally into the world of sound, its soul quality and enormous wealth, its off-and-on play of harmony and humor! Its love . . .

This was a rare occasion.

On Saturday morning, a group of Aurovilians started discussing a new structure of planning and development for Auroville in the new millennium, and will continue to do so tomorrow morning, while tonight rows of small, mud-baked little oil lamps will be seen curving through the villages around us and firecrackers will be lit everywhere.

It is Diwali (Deepavali), the festival of light. Tomorrow morning people will take early baths and don brand-new clothes, especially obtained for the occasion, and sweets will be eaten all day.

Mauna van der Vlugt was born in the Netherlands, lived at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the early seventies, and lives in Auroville. She is the secretary of Auroville International and is involved in many projects. She can be reached at mauna@auroville.org.in.

International pavilions to highlight human unity

Money earmarked for American pavilion

by Chandresh Patel

Auroville, the international city founded on the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother of human unity, peace, and harmony, has a charter that states: "Auroville belongs to nobody in particular, Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be a living servitor of the divine consciousness."

The forerunners working towards manifesting this vision are the 1,500 or so current residents (of the estimated 50,000 envisaged by the Mother) who come from more than twenty-five countries around the world.

As part of its international vision, Auroville's city plan includes an International Zone. One of the unifying factors critical to Auroville is to define and build pavilions in this International Zone, rep-

resenting what is essential and true and unique to each culture or country. This in turn will bring harmony and strength to the whole community.

The Auroville charter also states that "Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future; taking advantage of all discoveries from without and within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realizations." Indeed, one *raison-d'être* of Auroville is to counteract the divisiveness and distrust that nations created after the Second World War and which continued during the Cold War. In order to bridge our human turbulent past to divine future potentialities, a conscious effort of various peoples, governments, and grassroots movements around the world towards building the international pavilions is needed.

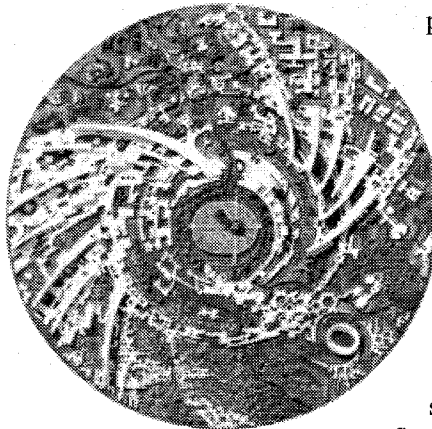
The first pavilion in the International Zone at Auroville is called Bharat Nivas, for the host country, India. A few other pavilions are under way, but most work has yet to begin.

Plans begun for American pavilion

Various efforts to define and bring about an American pavilion were made in the past, but did not come to fruition.

But the Auroville charter provides the vision for a new movement: "Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity."

In summer 1999, money was earmarked for an American pavilion; a group of interested persons restarted the dialog on how to define the purpose, use, and intention of what the pavilion should be in light of the



Mother's vision. The group, comprised of people from Auroville, the U.S., and others, will continue to communicate via an e-mail forum; all those interested to participate are invited to join. To do so, send an e-mail to pavilion-request@aurobindo.org. Leave the subject line blank. In the body, type **subscribe pavilion**.

This distributed community will work together to create a written document for the American pavilion (see sidebar, right, for a tentative outline) and then work on mobilizing resources to build the pavilion.

As someone having access to e-mail and computing resources and also some resources and time to spare for this project, I am volunteering to consolidate the various inputs and keep this document current. All suggestions are welcome.

Chandresh Patel is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Association. He lives in San Jose, California, where he manages a software company. He has an abiding interest in poetry as it relates to the Integral Yoga. He can be reached at cpatel@caesium.com.

Above: Galaxy plan of Auroville. (Photo from an early brochure)



Tentative outline for a document on the American pavilion

1. **Introduction/areas of exploration**
 - a. Auroville in the international context, from the Mother's perspective
 - b. Why international cooperation/representation is essential
 - c. Why an international zone in Auroville?
 - d. Essential ingredients for an international zone and pavilions
 - e. Needed structures (governmental and grass roots)
 - f. Financial strategies to pursue
2. **History, present, and evolving vision**
 - a. Mother's comments and correspondence to Americans on the pavilions
 - b. Early work done on the American pavilion in Auroville and in the U.S.
 - c. Why efforts stalled; post analysis
 - d. How the new momentum started again in 1999; how money-power was arranged; how an architect materialized from the past
 - e. Early discussion on American pavilion in context of architecture and current global viewpoints
 - f. How we can collectively formulate and carry the vision forward
3. **Collaboration: past, present and beyond**
 - a. Summary of 2.b and 2.c: overview of teamwork from previous effort
 - b. How do we make a new effort in the project as a distributed collective?
 - c. How do we involve the Auroville community in this project and get active participation of friends of Auroville within the U.S.?
 - d. Is there a method of working on other collective projects we can emulate?
4. **Plan of action, locally and globally**
 - a. Solicit global input in order to entice more collaborators within Auroville and the U.S.
 - b. Prepare a final draft, soliciting active participation
 - c. Prepare a plan of action for materializing the American pavilion, work with various groups in Auroville and the U.S. to move this forward

The yoga today

Sri Aurobindo: Inside, outside, upside down

Reflections on yoga in one's life

by David Hutchinson

This talk was given at the Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco on 15 August 1999.

When I came to San Francisco twenty years ago I imagined my future to be in the university, as a teacher of Sanskrit or perhaps Indian religion. But Sri Aurobindo has ruined me for scholastic work. Despite the rigorous logic of his *Life Divine*, his is not a study, it is a call to action. As the Mother said, he represents an action direct from the Supreme. His *shakti* may manifest in words and mental knowledge, but it is not based on thought nor does it find its highest pinnacle there.

"Inside, outside, upside down" may sound like a strange topic on Sri Aurobindo's birthday. But through these three directions we will explore Sri Aurobindo and his yoga. All yoga starts on the inside, with contemplation and discovery. It then moves outside, towards action. And the culmination of yoga is a reversal, a turning upside down of fundamental perceptions. Inside, outside, upside down.

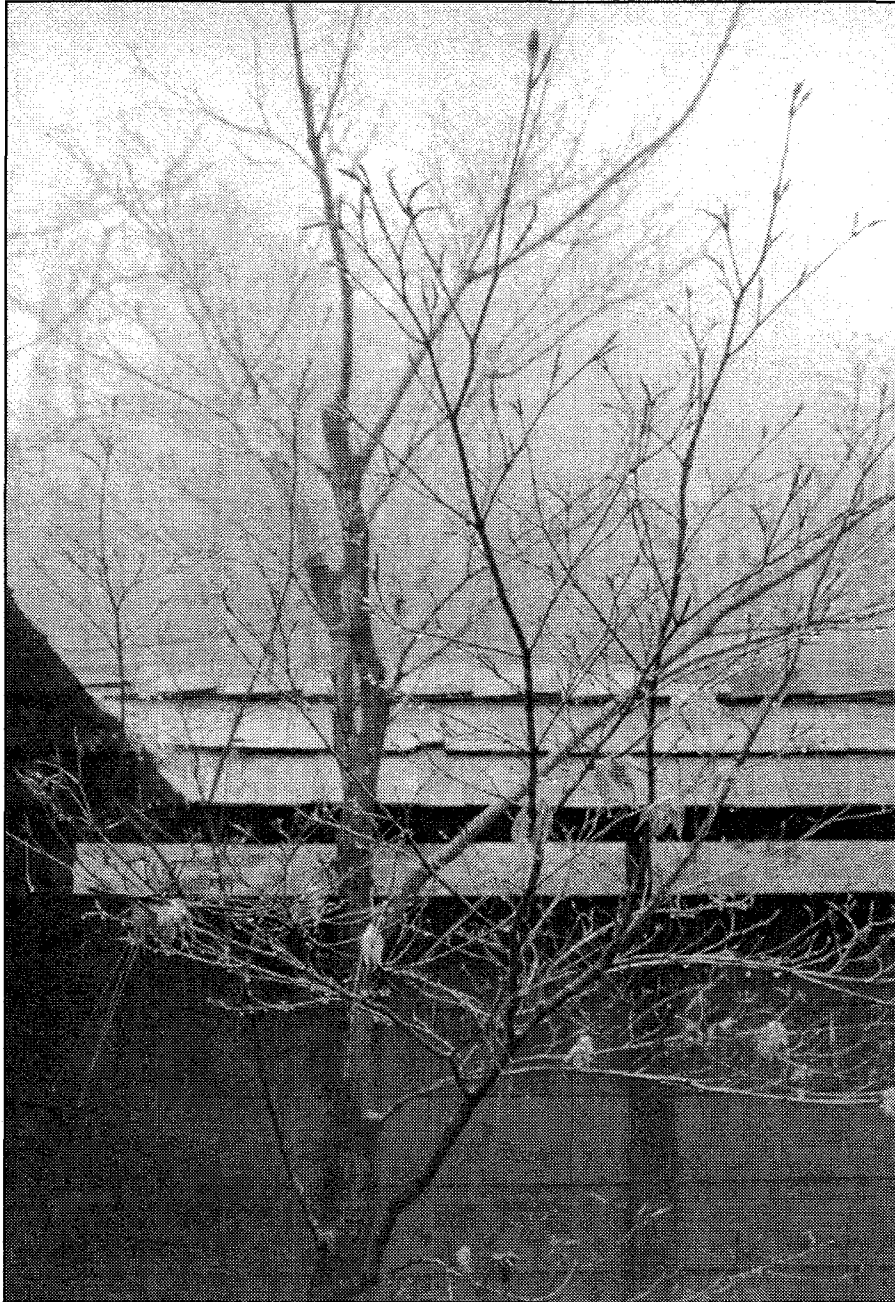
Inside

Recently someone posed a question on the e-mail list where the Integral Yoga is discussed. An acquaintance had asked him, "Who is the Mother? What does she mean to you?"—and he didn't know how to answer. Subjects close to our hearts are often the most difficult to explain.

In the summer of 1998, I lay next to my father on a bed; he had become disabled through Parkinson's disease. We were discussing what Sri Aurobindo means to me. I wanted to say that I have two fathers, he who brought me to adulthood, and Sri Aurobindo who was taking me beyond the human. But how do you say that to your own father?

What do Sri Aurobindo and the Mother mean to you who are in this yoga? No doubt the experience each of you has differs widely, even radically. But we recognize each other as family, we who have devoted ourselves to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who see the yoga as the one true goal in life. This recognition is not a set of beliefs, nor is there any external measure; rather, one has to spend time with another person, see the light in the eyes, the link in the heart.

Sri Aurobindo wrote to a biographer, "Neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been



Rain, silence, and peace. (Photo by Marta Belén)

lived on the surface for men to see.”¹ If we are to meet him, we have to go inside, turn inward. During the next hour let us do just that: pause, contemplate greatness, and examine our relationship with Sri Aurobindo.

You will have to excuse me if I sound like a *bhakta*, but there are some topics for which normal emotions do not

apply. Whatever truth is in me is due to Sri Aurobindo’s influence. The last twenty years of my life have been spent with him at my side, day after day, year after year, in a struggle to rise to his presence, and at every moment I feel his weight pressing down on me. He has guided my body along dark mountain trails, steadied my emotions in the face

of physical danger, and filled my being with joy in the midst of great suffering.

How do we meet Sri Aurobindo? For some, he comes in a dream. For others, he shows himself in visions. For many, his influence is more universal: light in the mind, bliss in the heart, peace in the being. But even if you do not have these experiences, I would say to you that there is a lifetime’s education, and a whole universe to explore, by simply reading his books at the level of the mind alone.

Would you like to meet Sri Aurobindo? Read him out loud. Whether you believe in or feel anything other than the ideas in Sri Aurobindo’s books, a perfectly wonderful way to meet the man is to read him into the air, using your own voice. Read to yourself, or to a friend, or to a spouse. Talk or be silent. Read a sentence or a chapter, stop to ponder, stop to laugh at the sheer truth of it. Read him as if the words were yours—make his thoughts and his reality yours. Then Sri Aurobindo will enter your life.

Thomas Carlyle wrote, “If a book comes from the heart, it will contrive to reach other hearts.”² Sri Aurobindo’s words come from places far beyond the heart—and are capable of reaching those places within us as well. Do not become discouraged if some of his writings, such as *Savitri*, are difficult or even impossible to read at first. I myself could not read *Savitri* for years; it was as mysterious as an Egyptian scroll. Once Sri Aurobindo awakens those hidden places, your life will be changed forever.

His works encompass a stunningly wide range. If you are an activist, read the *Bande Mataram* for some fiery political rhetoric, then *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity* for the general picture. If philosophy is your interest, read *The Life Divine*, with its finely textured reasoning. If you would like exposition of traditional Indian texts, read *Essays on the Gita*, which tracks the original virtually sloka by sloka through the entire text.



But if you are called to yoga, as I suspect most of us are, because of its clarion call for experience and realization, then a special pleasure awaits you. Sri Aurobindo wrote four books that collectively hold more yogic knowledge than the world is likely to see for some time to come.

First is *The Synthesis of Yoga*. I confess to having an almost inordinate love of this book, having read it perhaps a dozen times. *Synthesis* was my introduction to Sri Aurobindo,

The last twenty years of my life have been spent with Sri Aurobindo at my side, day after day, year after year, in a struggle to rise to his presence.

and at a time when I imagined I knew the basics of Indian spirituality, it put a real scare into me. Even on the first page you realize that everything you have read before is but a guess, an intimation, whereas here is truth, experienced directly, stated in perfect wholeness. In *The Synthesis of Yoga* you meet a teacher who can place every aspect of the spiritual life into perspective, page after page, chapter after chapter. Our small study group in Sacramento reads *Synthesis* aloud, and often we stop after a paragraph just to exclaim at the reality and force that flows through the words.

Second is *Letters on Yoga*. Here are excerpted thousands of details about the actual working out of yoga in the lives of individuals. If you are wondering about visions, or what advice a guru would give to someone struggling with sexual impulses, it's all here, from the same man who could present the global overview of *Synthesis*.

Third, if you can open your mind, is *Savitri*. Here you must read with a different consciousness; the words have to flow into you rather than being read. *Savitri* is a vision, not an argument; it is truth revealed and manifested, not explained. *Savitri*, with its sweeping visions and words of power, transcends the limits of the rational mind. Reading *Savitri* is rightfully said to be a complete sadhana unto itself. One summer, having nothing but time and solitude on my hands, I read through the entire epic aloud. Though it sounds impossible, such a reading takes only about forty hours, and if you do it, I guarantee you that it will reverberate within you for the rest of your life.

Lastly, for the person who has read everything, who is familiar with the whole sweep and range of spiritual writings East and West, who has mastered Sanskrit, who knows Sri Aurobindo's philosophy backwards and forwards, read his *Record of Yoga*. Here you meet a side of the man shown nowhere else, the practicing yogi. The *Record*, Sri Aurobindo's

journal of his own practice, is full of difficult Sanskrit. Here is a typical entry:

"First two *chatusthayas* attacked and momentarily touched. *Sraddha* farther shaken especially in *Saundaryam* and *Utthapana* of the *Sharira* and consequently in *Karmachatushtaya*."

The *Record* is organized by a structure called the *sapta chatusthaya*, seven groups of four. The first chatusthaya is *santi* or *samata*—peace, equanimity. Equality is emphasized throughout Sri Aurobindo's writings as the first necessity, as the rock on which all else stands. The second chatusthaya is *shakti*, right power of the instruments. The third is *vijnana*, or supermind. What could possibly remain beyond attainment of the supermind? Perfection of the body, the fullness of universal Brahman consciousness, universal action, and complete yogic perfection, *siddhi*. The *Record* shows the daily practical workings among these superhuman levels, put in a simple, straightforward style.

Ashley Montagu, a true genius of our time, wrote that "All reality is relationship, and all relationships are enlarged and enriched in proportion to the sensitivity with which they are perceived and lived." Have you not known a friend with whom you forged a special bond, shared the trivialities of daily life? The touch of truth often comes unexpectedly through a person, an example, a word spoken or an act observed. Although we may think of yoga as a solitary practice, it is not limited to those half-hours seated in lotus on the floor. Yoga also develops in the full press of life, in the spark of soul to soul. We have the power to lift each other at every moment.

In my early days as a nurse, when every moment seemed like a crisis, our unit had a young doctor with an air of calmness so complete that he seemed to move and talk in slow motion, even when all around him were losing their heads. His presence was palpable. Later I studied with a music teacher who could take you in any condition, whether a state of complete ineptitude or sublime mastery, and inspire you to move to the next level. Even a brief nearness of this sort reshapes our lives.

In such relationships, which can last a lifetime, you open up to new possibilities, feel a joy in the goodness, the truth of another person. Life is enriched, enlarged. Imagine that sense of enlargement magnified a thousandfold—close your eyes and feel the silent peace of a mountain at dawn, the heart-wrenching beauty of a desert sunset—you have begun to feel the companion that is Sri Aurobindo. A feeling such as *Savitri* had on seeing Satyavan for the first time:



A mystic tumult from her depths arose;
Haled, smitten erect like one who dreamed at ease,
Life ran to gaze from every gate of sense:
Thoughts indistinct and glad in moon-mist heavens,
Feelings as when a universe takes birth,
Swept through the turmoil of her bosom's space
Invaded by a swarm of golden gods:
Arising to a hymn of wonder's priests
Her soul flung wide its doors to this new sun.
An alchemy worked, the transmutation came;
The missioned face had wrought the Master's spell.
In the nameless light of two approaching eyes
A swift and fated turning of her days
Appeared and stretched to the gleam of unknown worlds.
Then trembling with the mystic shock her heart
Moved in her breast and cried out like a bird
Who hears his mate upon a neighbouring bough.³

When a companion lives in realms which we can not even imagine, journeyed on roads beyond our reckoning, such a one becomes a teacher or a guru. Speaking of the guru, in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo writes: "This inner Guide is often veiled at first by the very intensity of our personal effort and by the ego's preoccupation with itself and its aims."⁴ The answers to our questions depend on us; our openness to Sri Aurobindo's truth will vary, depending on our history.

As a young man I did not believe that a personal relationship could be a vehicle for higher truth. My yoga had been interior, pursued in an aspiration for peace or silence. When I met my future wife Marta, however, a universe of possibilities began to unfold, and I realized that one can transcend normal relationships, that in the midst of living there can be a sharing of oneness and joy between two people. As Mary Shelley said, harmony is the soul of our companionship.

I mention this not only as a testament to greater things, but also as a reminder that all good things are based on an inner connection, not the incidentals of birth or belief. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The soul can recognize its answering soul
Across dividing Time and, on Life's roads
Absorbed wrapped traveller, turning it recovers
Familiar splendours in an unknown face
And touched by the warning finger of swift love
It thrills again to an immortal joy
Wearing a mortal body for delight.
There is a Power within that knows beyond
Our knowings; we are greater than our thoughts,
And sometimes earth unveils that vision here.
To live, to love are signs of infinite things,
Love is a glory from eternity's spheres.⁵

Sri Aurobindo can be that answering soul. To meet him you must become him, or at least emulate his infinite qualities. Not by attempting to write another *Savitri*, or a commentary on the Gita, but by embodying his essential characteristics. For if his life was—is—lived on the interior rather than the exterior, that is where Sri Aurobindo can be found.

How does one emulate Sri Aurobindo? By developing an unqualified silence, a wide universality of thought, a mind that dispassionately considers all things, that hangs onto no fixed opinions. By having a flexibility of consciousness, an openness to higher things, a plasticity to higher forces. By inculcating a depth of sincerity, a fidelity to truth in all its richness. Above all, by surrendering to the universal and divine, by a willingness to be guided by the Mother, the universal shakti.

Outside

Over the years a curious thing has happened to me. I have started to find Sri Aurobindo in more and more people and events. It may sound strange and (God forbid!) religious, but there it is. An event will unfold with unexpected harmony; persons at a meeting will understand each other instantly; a divine beauty will manifest at a glance.

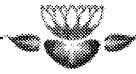
What does this have to do with Sri Aurobindo? Not much, on first consideration. But when you have spent years rising to meet his truth, an odd thing happens: all knowledge starts to become an approximation to that. You read a commentary on the Gita and say to yourself, "Aha, this author is speaking from about ten percent experience, and ninety percent book knowledge."

Sri Aurobindo gives you this benchmark of truth. Compared to him, all writers and teachers are guessing. Ram Das wrote of the desire that drove him for many years, perhaps his whole life, to meet someone who *knew*, who knew solidly, completely, someone he could ask any question and be assured of an answer. I too had that gnawing hunger until coming upon Sri Aurobindo.

When you finally meet Sri Aurobindo, if you can recognize him at all, the search is over. Not the path, but the search. The measuring stick of truth has been found. This doesn't mean that all other learning ceases. But you need never fall prey again to the fundamental uncertainty that plagues the modern mind. Learning becomes an exploration, not a groping.

If we look at spiritual life as learning a craft, coming to Sri Aurobindo begins the period of apprenticeship. First we learn the principles and the skills, then we go out into the world and practice them. Going out into the world is the difficult part, and constantly surprising.

A few years ago I went to Pondicherry for the first time. I expected to be overwhelmed by the heat, the dust, the noise. But what really unseated me was the frenetic pace of life. In the United States, everyone feels pressured: no time, too many commitments, too much work. No time to breathe, let alone reflect. So what did I find in the small town of Pondicherry?



Many people had the same sense of pressure, of life speeded up—and a feeling that essentials were being missed in the headlong rush of events.

Even in Pondicherry, where Sri Aurobindo's presence is physically palpable, the pace of life can disrupt one's peace. For yoga to be effective, we have to bring the peace we gain in quieter moments out, into action, into life.

This is the crucial movement for each of us. It is the most difficult, because manifesting spiritual awareness means overcoming the most obstinate and protean part of the being, the vital nature, as well as its visible part, the desire-soul. Sri Aurobindo says:

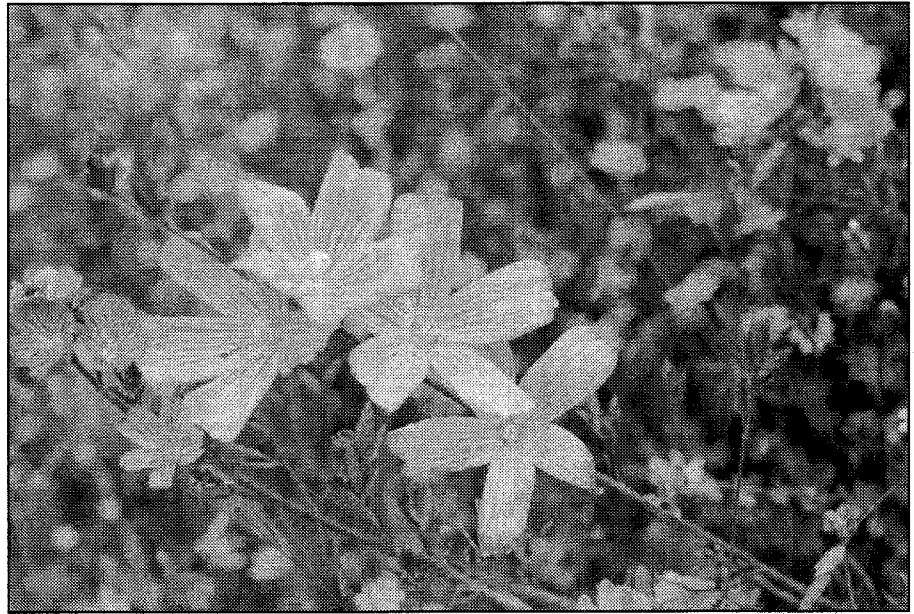
"For truth of the Spirit has not to be merely thought but to be lived, and to live it demands a unified single-mindedness of the being; so great a change as is contemplated by the Yoga is not to be effected by a divided will or by a small portion of the energy or by a hesitating mind."⁶

Quieting the mind is small potatoes compared to taming and redirecting the vital; to do that, we must call in something more effective. Big things do come in small packages; in this case the psychic, the glowing diamond in the heart.

The psychic being is the secret of the yoga, the secret to taming the vital, and enabling the highest, and most integrated action.

Remember that equanimity is the first word in the sadhana, the basis of the sadhana. Then one develops shakti, the working power of the instruments. In the chapter titled "The Elements of Perfection," toward the end of *Synthesis*, Sri Aurobindo gives a concise description of this second aspect, shakti, of the *sapta chatusthaya*:

"The next necessity of perfection is to raise all the active parts of the human nature to that highest condition and working pitch of their power and capacity, *sakti*, at which they become capable of being divinised into true instruments of the free, perfect, spiritual and divine action. For practical purposes we may take the understanding, the heart, the



"Love of flowers is a valuable help for finding and uniting with the psychic."—The Mother.
(Photo by Marta Belén)

Prana, and the body as the four members of our nature which have to be thus prepared . . .

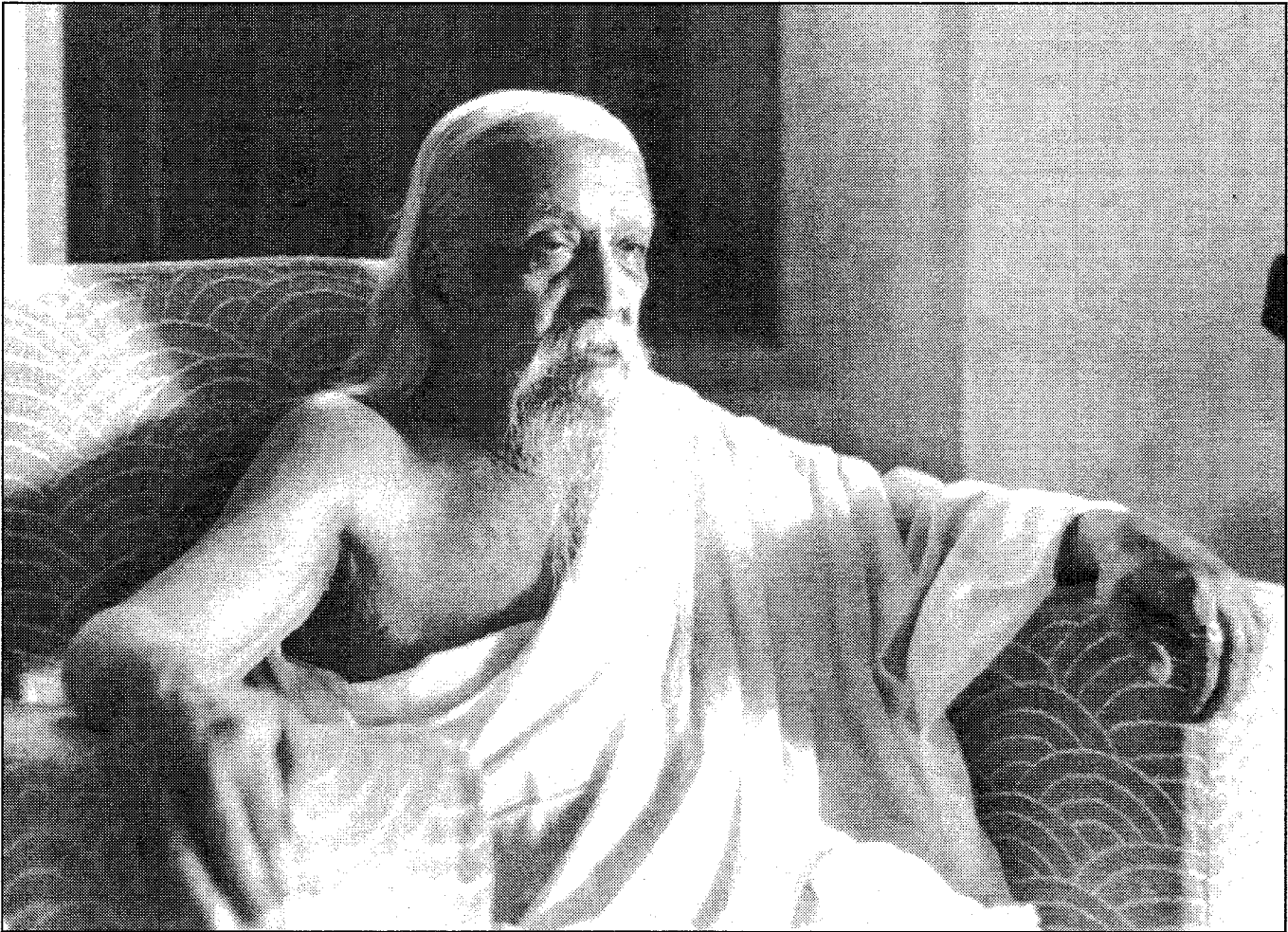
"To divinise the perfected nature we have to call in the divine Power or Shakti to replace our limited human energy so that this may be shaped into the image of and filled with the force of a greater infinite energy, *daivi prakriti*, *bhagavati sakti*. This perfection will grow in the measure in which we can surrender ourselves, first, to the guidance and then to the direct action of that Power and of the Master of our being and our works to whom it belongs, and for this purpose faith is the essential, faith is the great motor-power of our being in our aspirations to perfection,—here, a faith in God and the Shakti which shall begin in the heart and understanding, but shall take possession of all our nature, all its consciousness, all its dynamic motive-force."⁷

Shraddha (faith, or soul-force) emerges with the flowering of the psychic. Soul-force is the key to this yoga. In the average person, soul-force is only barely active; it supports the normal surface personality, but is not fully or directly active. As we open to the psychic,

this force begins to strengthen, and our qualities become purer and closer to the divine source. When it emerges, the psychic brings in the universal shakti.

One of the open secrets of the yoga is the necessity of bringing the psychic being forward, in order for the yoga to be effective in life. In *Synthesis*, Sri Aurobindo begins each section (the yoga of knowledge, love, or work) by stressing equanimity, but ends by stressing the necessity of the psychic for completing the job.

"At a certain stage in the yoga when the mind is sufficiently quieted and no longer supports itself at every step on the sufficiency of its mental certitudes, when the vital has been steadied and subdued and is no longer constantly insistent on its own rash will, demand and desire, when the physical has been sufficiently altered not to bury altogether the inner flame under the mass of its outwardness, obscurity or inertia, an inmost being hidden within and felt only in its rare influences is able to come forward and illumine the rest and take up the lead of the



Sri Aurobindo in 1950. (Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

Sadhana . . . Its action is like a search-light showing up all that has to be changed in the nature; it has in it a flame of will insistent on perfection, on an alchemic transmutation of all the inner and outer existence.”⁸

You may wonder how to recognize this new will. Sri Aurobindo gives specific indications:

“ . . . something of the supreme Will can manifest in us as an imperative impulsion, a God-driven action; we then act by a spontaneous self-determining Force but a fuller knowledge of meaning and aim arises only afterwards. Or the impulse to action may come as an inspiration or intuition, but rather in the heart and body than in the mind; here an effective sight enters in but the complete and

exact knowledge is still deferred and comes, if at all, later. But the divine Will may descend too as a luminous single command or a total perception or a continuous current of perception of what is to be done into the will or into the thought or as a direction from above spontaneously fulfilled by the lower members.”⁹

Earlier we spoke of the seven-fold steps of the yoga, beginning with equanimity. As the psychic comes forward, it develops four essential qualities of the being: a mind of light; an effective will-force; practical arrangement of things; and the power of service to others. In the end, soul-power emerges with its true universality, as Sri Aurobindo describes here:

“An enlightened life of the mind grasps at all knowledge with a delight of finding and reception and holding, a spiritual enthusiasm, passion, or ecstasy . . . a bottomless steadiness and illimitable calm upholds all the illumination . . .

“An absolute calm fearlessness of the free spirit, an infinite dynamic courage . . . a high nobility of will . . .

“ . . . a soul-power of mutuality, a free self-spending . . . a great taking into oneself from all beings and a free giving out of oneself to all, a divine commerce, a large enjoyment of the mutual delight of life.

“ . . . the soul-power of service, the universal love that lavishes itself without demand of return, the embrace that



takes into itself the body of God in man and works for help and service . . . the self-surrender of the whole being to the Master of our being and his work in the world.”¹⁰

What better description of Sri Aurobindo? As you develop these qualities, you approach him.

Upside down

When the yoga starts to flower, it turns everything upside down. You step into the kitchen and the countertop giggles; go outside, and the trees laugh. Thoughts and feelings from last week seem antiquated, ancient and musty and lifeless. Goals that only yesterday filled your horizon shrink to dust motes in an infinite vista of possibility.

Jacques Lusseyran, in the extraordinary autobiography titled *And There Was Light*, writes of his initial experience with the light of truth, after being physically blinded as a child:

“I realized that I was looking in the wrong way. It was as simple as that . . . I was looking too far off, and too much on the surface of things.

“This was more than a simple discovery, it was a revelation. I can still see myself in the Champs de Mars, where my father had taken me for a walk a few days after the accident. Of course I knew the garden well, its ponds, its railings, its iron chairs. I even knew some of the trees in person, and naturally I wanted to see them again. But I couldn’t. I threw myself forward into the substance which was space, but which I did not recognize because it no longer held anything familiar to me.

“At this point some instinct—I was almost about to say a hand laid on me—made me change course. I began to look more closely, not at things but at a world closer to myself, looking from an inner place to one further within, instead of clinging to the movement of sight toward the world outside.

“Immediately, the substance of the universe drew together, redefined and peopled itself anew. I was aware of a radiance emanating from a place I knew nothing about, a place which might as well have been outside me as within. But radiance was there, or, to put it more precisely, light. It was a fact, for light was there.

“I felt indescribable relief, and happiness so great it almost made me laugh. Confidence and gratitude came as if a prayer had been answered. I found light and joy at the same moment, and I can say without hesitation that from that time on light and joy have never been separated in my experience. I have had them or lost them together.”¹¹

Here Lusseyran describes an individual experience, whereas Sri Aurobindo gives the wider picture:

“The Shakti, the power of the Infinite and the Eternal descends within us, works, breaks up our present psychological formations, shatters every wall, widens, liberates, presents us with always newer and greater powers of vision, ideation, perception and newer and greater life-motives, enlarges and new-models increasingly the soul and its instruments, confronts us with every imperfection in order to convict and destroy it,

opens to a greater perfection, does in a brief period the work of many lives or ages, so that new births and new vistas open constantly within us.”¹²

At the end of book 7, canto 5, “The Finding of the Soul,” after Savitri has had her psychic awakening, Sri Aurobindo gives these words:

In the slow process of the evolving spirit,
In the brief stade between a death and birth
A first perfection’s stage is reached at last;
Out of the wood and stone of our nature’s stuff
A temple is shaped where the high gods could live.
Even if the struggling world is left outside
One man’s perfection still can save the world.
There is won a new proximity to the skies,
A first betrothal of the Earth to Heaven,
A deep concordat between Truth and Life:
A camp of God is pitched in human time.¹³

To walk on Sri Aurobindo’s path is a noble and joyful undertaking, all the more so because of he who travels with you. Sri Aurobindo calls us to a divine transformation, a refashioning of our very being. Just as he often said that the world is real, I say to you that Sri Aurobindo and his yoga are real, as much so as the building we are in or the city around us. Find him, meet him, identify yourself with him, and your life will change in ways you cannot even imagine.

End notes

1. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust), vol. 26, front matter.
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3. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, SABCL, vol. 29, pp. 395–396.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, vol. 20, p. 56.
5. *Savitri*, vol. 29, p. 397.
6. *Synthesis*, vol. 20, pp. 63–64.
7. *Synthesis*, vol. 21, p. 666.
8. *Synthesis*, vol. 20, p. 145.
9. *Synthesis*, vol. 20, p. 207.
10. *Synthesis*, vol. 21, p. 723.
11. Jacques Lusseyran, *And There Was Light* (New York: Parabola Books, 1987), pp. 16–17.
12. *Synthesis*, vol. 20, p. 172.
13. *Savitri*, vol. 29, p. 531.

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Transformation. (Image courtesy William Rowe, Exotic Alphabets and Ornament, Dover Publications, Inc., 1974)

Eight questions

Where is the yoga headed in the new millennium?

by Vishnu Eschner, David Hutchinson, and Lynda Lester

Last summer the three of us drove through Colorado to the All-USA Meeting in Baca, passing through spectacular high country and talking about the yoga. Each of us feel ourselves to be “traditional” in our general perspective, but at the same time have thought a great deal about the future of yoga.

We came up with eight questions that we later offered to a group of about

thirty attendees at AUM. Although discussion promised to be lively, time ran out almost before we got started. However, many people asked for copies to read and think about later.

Here are the questions again. What do you think? Written responses are welcome! Send e-mail to editor@collaboration.org, or postal mail to Editor, Collaboration, P.O. Box 163237, Sacramento, CA 95816 USA.

1. Do we need traditional gurus anymore?

Is the simple guru-disciple relationship the only one that can be productive of spiritual growth, development, learning? Or are there other, more equal rela-

tionships—perhaps completely unimaginable ones—that are coming into play, as the yoga fulfills itself, such as the relation between transitional or gnostic beings?

2. Are the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the last word in the yoga, or are there fresh insights, new findings yet to be discovered?

The natural tendency is to look backward to the written words and statements of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as all-encompassing and complete. But are they the only source? During their lifetimes, the yoga grew, changed, and developed new terminology, new forces, and new expressions. Could that be happening today?



3. Is the yoga still developing? Is new knowledge available that was not available to sadhaks or the world in 1940 or 1970?

The conventional view is to look to elders in the community, or to their writings, for insight and direction. But if the yoga is progressive, if the supermind is active now, or if the Mother's work on the physical made a radical change in the earth's atmosphere, could new knowledge, experiences, and developments be emerging that were not present in earlier decades?

4. Is the traditional yoga of Sri Aurobindo "out of date" now that the supermind is active upon the earth?

There is a general consensus about what the "classical" yoga entails, from its first beginnings in equanimity and aspiration, through the opening of the psychic and the higher ranges of mentality, to the supermind. These guidelines were laid down before the supermind became active upon the earth. Is this overall approach still valid, or is it possible to pursue the yoga along other lines?

5. Can one do the physical transformation before the psychic and spiritual transformations? Is it possible to work on cellular consciousness before working through the stages of Sri Aurobindo's yoga?

The triple transformation is generally understood to be sequential, or at the very least, the supramental or physical transformations are understood to follow the psychic and spiritual. Is this still true? Or is it possible to do real work on the consciousness of the cells, for example, while one still lives in the surface consciousness? Does one have to have an opening to the subliminal before effective work can be done on cellular consciousness, or on subconscious or inconscient layers?

6. Is the traditional stricture against sharing experiences still valid?

Prematurely sharing personal experiences has long been known to adversely affect the experience itself, perhaps through mixing of one's consciousness with skepticism that arises, or through ego involvement. Are there ways or times or persons with whom this stricture changes, and sharing of experiences can become a method for progress in the yoga?

7. Is celibacy still valid as a requirement for progress in this yoga?

Celibacy has long been prescribed for serious spiritual aspirants, because sex strongly involves the physical and the vital, opening a person to many forces that can impede spiritual progress. Is this admonition still valid? And/or, if the very nature of the physical will change due to the emergence of the supermind, will the role of sex as a factor in sadhana also change?

8. Is it enough to be a traditional sadhak, or are there forces emerging in the world (communication, technology, virtual reality) that change the nature of practice of the yoga itself?

The goal of Integral Yoga is to return upon the world with a transformed individual vehicle, to do the work of the Divine in the world, among its million-fold forces and peoples. Does the emergence of communication technologies that are closely

bound to consciousness change the nature of practice in the yoga itself? Or is the yoga essentially unchanged by these developments?

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Earth hour

"This human hour, this earthly hour is the most beautiful of all the hours."—The Mother

This column focuses on the day-to-day practice of Integral Yoga: what it looks and feels like, its stumblings and gropings, its progress and aspirations. The following selection is taken from a journal of yoga.

Stages toward transformation

by Lynda Lester

22 June 1988

There are four stages in moving toward the transformation.

1) When you start the yoga: the first many years. You're visionary, enthusiastic, and have no doubt that (although everyone has failed before you) you will succeed, you'll do the transformation. You absolutely believe this, are certain.

2) Then, after a long long time, you start looking around and realize no one around you in the yoga is having much luck; they're just as human as they always were, for the most part, nothing much has changed—except they're all getting older, their skin is weathered, their hair is turning grey.

And you look at yourself—you, the hope of tomorrow, the great plum pudding, the would-be capturer of the Holy Grail—and you realize that you're just as much of an ordinary, unchanged, totally human-in-all-your-parts person as all the rest of them. You haven't transformed one iota of your nature.

All those long ascetic periods didn't do a bit of good. You're still drinking coffee and eating hot dogs from Seven Eleven; you're twenty-five pounds overweight again. Isn't this where you started?

You have no control over your vital, no equanimity, you're not doing karma yoga, and in your day-to-day, moment-to-moment existence, there's nothing yogic about your life at all. All you think about is yourself, not the Divine. In fact, you don't even think about the Divine that much at all, except for exceptional moments and spiritual experiences.

3) Then you read someone like Ken Wilbur, who says it's just baby-boomer narcissism to think that some major



global transformative change, the biggest in history, will happen in *your* life and *you* will be part of it (*you* of course are one of the elect)—that obviously something's happening, but it's an information revolution and globalization happening, which is quite different from spiritualization. The real New Age will come all right, probably, but not for hundreds of years.

And you talk to someone in the yoga whom you love and respect, like X, who says, "There's a lot of denial in Auroville, people are oblivious to the ordinary crude stuff they're caught in. They say, 'Oh, I'll be transformed—' when the fact is that emotional and psychological nonsense of the most obvious sort is going on, some inexcusable things. They think they're not accountable because they're 'doing yoga'—but really they're just living ordinary human lives, raising families and so forth, and not acknowledging the fact.

"Well I for one," X concludes, "don't expect to be transformed in this life."

And with that, your whole belief structure, all your hopes and dreams, the purpose of your life, break into tiny crumbling pieces and the whole edifice falls down. And you think: Now, at last, you're realistic; now you know it's impossible. What an egotist! What a conceited, self-inflated, deluded dreamer you've been. You can't make it. It's absurd to imagine. *Mother* didn't make it. Sri Aurobindo either.

Yes, it will be a matter of hundreds of years. Maybe a thousand.

And a little bird rises out of you like a sigh, the bird of your youthful idealism, the bird of your exaggerated yogic hopes, and flies away.

You feel sad. The clouds are gray, it's raining.

But there's relief too: now you don't have to struggle anymore. You can do the best you can, of course, but you don't have to be crazed, you don't have to be madly passionate, you don't have to fight so hard—it's so difficult fighting. You don't have to be nagged by your conscience that you're doing a lousy job; you're free of the onus of achievement.

It's OK. You can be at peace, you can relax. And a soothing voice says, "There, there, it's all right, you're all right now, everything's going to be all right, the war's over. The landscape's not so pretty, you'll have to live in ruins, but it will be quiet—go and live a good life. You don't have to worry now that you won't make it—you know you won't."

And that brings a certain comfort.

4) The fourth stage: Screw it all, you'll do it anyway.

And since it hasn't worked yet, you will be consumed by it, you will put all you have into it, you will make it your one abiding, visualized, expected, activized, real-time, real-life manifested goal.

And if you don't make it, OK, but you're sure as hell not going to go around, at forty years old (X is only thirty-four) saying you expect not to. What a way to give up four decades in advance!

So that's my new plan: to be totally immodest, to set out to actually accomplish the transformation—aggressively, willfully, purposefully, to really *do* it—to believe I will, to work in an utterly concentrated way toward it—to work toward the transformation with all the passion and fire, the endurance, the hard work, the attention I've put into other things.

This last just occurred to me today.

I think I like the idea.

Now I've got to think about doing it.

It will mean giving up hot dogs at Seven Eleven.

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Essay

Mother meets Sri Aurobindo

An excerpt from Georges Van Vrekhem's new biography of the Mother

by Georges Van Vrekhem

The following is an excerpt from chapter 6 of Georges' forthcoming book, The Mother: The Story of Her Life.

"When I came to Pondicherry a programme was dictated to me from within for my Sadhana. I followed it and progressed for myself but could not do much by way of helping others. Then came the Mother and with her help I found the necessary method."—Sri Aurobindo, *Glimpses of the Mother's Life*, p. 132

First questions

When Mirra met A.G., as Aurobindo Ghose was known and had signed his letters since his arrival in Pondicherry, she had her questions ready. These questions were the natural result of her effort of inner development, and some of them we know because she has mentioned them.

One question was about the state of samadhi or trance. As the Mother later narrated to her audience in the Ashram Playground, "In all kinds of so-called spiritual literature I had always read wonderful things about this state of trance or samadhi, but I had never experienced it. So I did not know whether this was perhaps a sign of inferiority. And when I came here, one of my first questions to Sri Aurobindo was: 'What do you think of samadhi, of that state of trance one does not remember? One enters into a condition which seems to be blissful, but when one comes out of it, one has no idea of what has happened.'



“He looked at me, saw what I meant and told me, ‘It is unconsciousness . . . You enter into what is called samadhi when you go out of your conscious being and enter into a part of your being which is completely unconscious, or rather into a domain where you have no corresponding consciousness: you go beyond the field of your consciousness and enter a region where you are no longer conscious. You are in the impersonal state, that is to say, a state in which you are unconscious, and that is the reason why, naturally, you remember nothing, because you were not conscious of anything.’ So this reassured me and I said, ‘Well, this has never happened to me.’ He replied, ‘Nor to me.’”¹

Another of Mirra’s questions was why, in spite of her many talents, she had always been so “mediocre” in everything she did: painting, writing, music . . . Aurobindo’s answer was simply that this was indispensable for her development. We may infer that people who are extraordinarily gifted in a certain field have to dedicate their life exclusively to the realization of that one talent, while Mirra had to sample an experience as varied as possible and engage beyond all that in a totally new and synthetic enterprise.

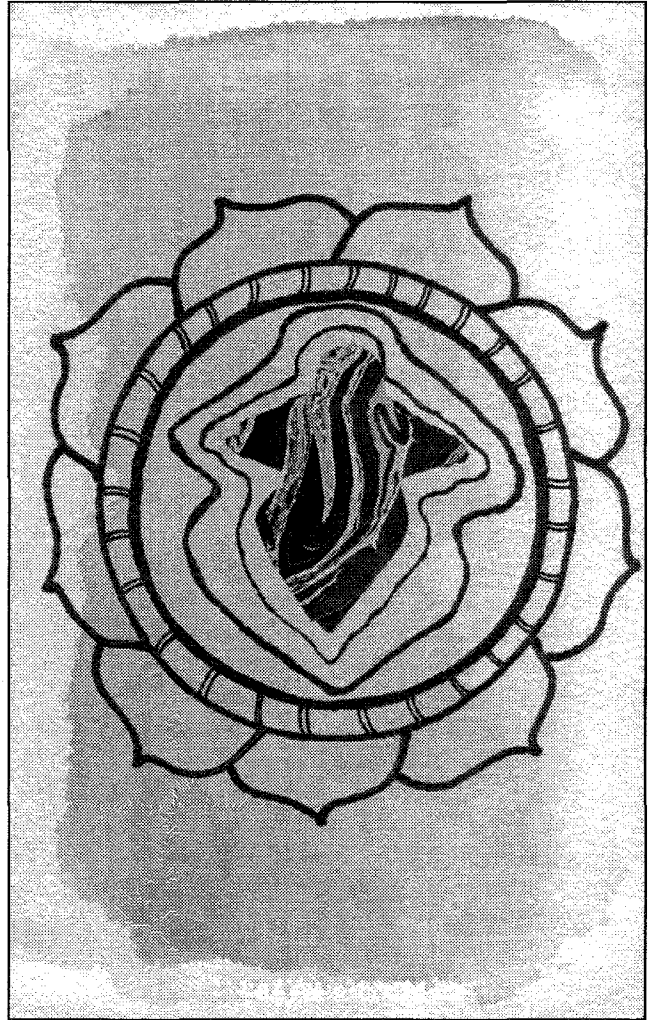
A third question—in reality perhaps the first one—would prove to be of immense importance for things to come. “It was the very first question which came up when I met Sri Aurobindo,” the Mother said later:

“Should you do your yoga, attain the goal, and then afterwards take up the work with others, or should you immediately let all those who have the same aspiration gather around you and go forward all together towards the goal? Because of my earlier work and all that I had tried out, I came to Sri Aurobindo with this question very precisely formulated. Because the two possibilities were there: either to practice an intensive individual sadhana by withdrawing from the world, that is, by no longer having any contact with others, or to let the group be formed naturally and spontaneously, not preventing it from being formed, allowing it to form by itself, and starting all together on the path.

“Well, the decision was not at all a mental choice, it came spontaneously. The circumstances were such that no choice was required. I mean, quite naturally, spontaneously, the group was formed in such a way that it became an imperious necessity. And so, once you have started like that, it is settled, you have to go on like that to the end.”²

The day after her arrival and her first meeting with Aurobindo, Mirra had an overwhelming experience. We know that she had already realized the Godhead in the heart and the full awakening of the kundalini. Now, with her openness, sensitivity, and trained capacity of entering into others, she received from Aurobindo something she never expected.

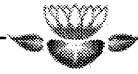
“I was seated close to him [Aurobindo], simply, like that, on the floor. He was sitting on a chair with a table in front of



Mixed-media art by Catherine Blackburn

him, and on the other side of the table was Richard, and they were talking. Myself, I didn’t listen. I sat there just like that. I don’t know how long they went on talking, but suddenly I felt within me as it were a great Force—Peace! Silence! massive. It came, did like this (*a gesture of sweeping at the level of the forehead*), descended like that, and stopped here (*the chest*). And when they finished talking, I stood up and left. And then I noticed that I didn’t have a thought in my mind—that I knew nothing any more, understood nothing any more, that I was absolutely in a complete *blank*. Then I gave thanks to the Lord, and thanked Sri Aurobindo in my heart.”³

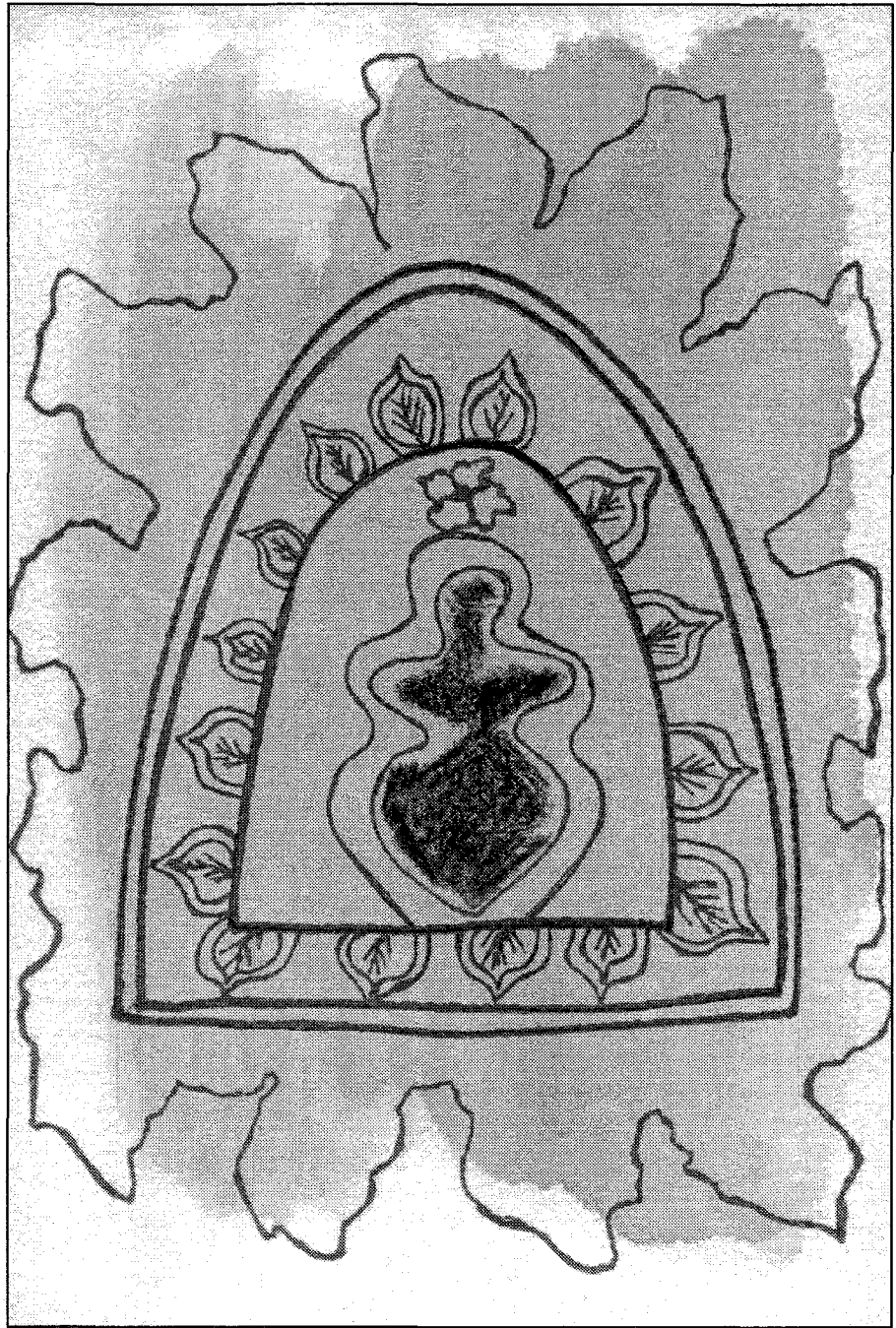
Aurobindo had imparted to her his mental, “nirvanic” silence, his first great realization obtained when sitting with V.B. Lele in Baroda and which never left him afterwards. Just before sitting down on the floor, Mirra had confided to him that, try as she may to keep that silence in the mind, she was unable to do it. Aurobindo had given it to her without even intending to, just by occult communication and because of her



total openness, which in their yoga would be called “surrender.” Asked years later by Barin what had struck him the most when first meeting Mirra, Aurobindo would indeed say her self-surrender “so absolute and unreserved.”

This means that from that moment onwards neither Aurobindo nor Mirra “thought” any more like ordinary humans do. In their absolute surrender to the Divine their “thoughts” came to them, were given to them how and when necessary, or when invited. A thought, as Mirra had learned from Théon and taught to her audiences in Paris, may be invisible to us because it belongs to a subtle, mental world, but it is all the same a concrete entity. Every human being lives within an occult edifice that consists of constructions of thoughts. In people who are incapable of clear thinking, such an edifice is shabbily put together; in people who live mainly in their head or in an unassailable conviction, such an edifice can be as impenetrable as a fortress and as enclosing as a prison. In the course of her occult and spiritual explorations, Mirra had carefully built up “a magnificent construction” that Aurobindo, just by irradiating his way of being, now had destroyed in an instant—and she was immensely grateful for it. She took great care not to spoil the new poise, which never left her again.

As always happens at the time of a decisive new spiritual experience, Mirra felt as if all her efforts that had preceded it meant nothing. “It seems to me that I am being born to a new life,” she wrote in her diary, “and that all the methods, all the habits of the past can no longer be of any use. It seems to me that what I thought were results is nothing more than a preparation. I feel as if I have done nothing yet, as though I have not lived the spiritual life, only entered the path that leads to it. It seems to me that I know nothing, that I am incapable of formulating anything, that all experience is yet to begin. It is as if I were stripped of my entire past, of its errors as



Mixed-media art by Catherine Blackburn

well as its conquests, as though all that has vanished and made room for a newborn child whose whole existence is yet to be lived . . . It seems to me that I have at last reached the threshold I sought for so much.”²⁴

Then a phenomenon followed that is a regular feature in all true spiritual

progress: the repercussion, the downward movement after a great experience or spiritual realization—according to Sri Aurobindo the Black Dragon lashing out with its tail in an effort to swipe away the spiritual gain.

“My physical organism suffered a defeat such as it had not known for sev-



eral years, and during a few days all the forces of my body failed me . . . Something in this aggregate [her body] which constitutes the instrument I can put at Thy service is still obscure and obtuse; something does not respond as it should to Thy forces, deforms and darkens their manifestation.”⁵

The problem at the end was already there at the beginning.

The launching of the *Arya*

In Mirra’s diary entries of these weeks, we find time and time again allusions to the continuous and absorbing practical occupations in which she had to engage and which often prevented her from calmly writing down the inner experiences of the day. Ever attentive, she soon understood that this harassing, aggressive outer world was the true terrain of the new yoga, not the undisturbed, holy heights of meditation and withdrawal as recommended in all the traditional spiritual paths.

The amount of activity performed in the first months of the stay at the Richards in Pondicherry is astonishing. They had arrived on 29 March and the elections were to be held on 26 April, less than a month later. Trying to make an impact and to have a chance of being elected, Paul Richard must have had a hectic schedule of speeches and traveling, for voting was to take place not only in Pondicherry, but also in Karikal (where the Richards went to canvass) and in the other French *comptoirs*, Chandernagore included (A.G. writing to ask Motilal Roy to try to gather votes for Richard). One of Mirra’s diary notes is dated “Karikal, 13 April 1914,” and there is no doubt that Mirra stood by the side of her husband throughout the campaign.

As soon as he had some time to spare, Richard went to see Aurobindo and discussed with him all possible topics on earth and in the heavens. Although Richard was not susceptible to Aurobindo’s spiritual realizations, he had an enormous respect for his intellectual powers. Which one was the first to

moot the publication of a review that would expound Aurobindo’s views? In a letter to a disciple, Sri Aurobindo wrote that it was Paul Richard. “Richard proposed to me to co-operate in a philosophical review—and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand at anything, I could not very well refuse.”⁶

At the time, Aurobindo spoke rather highly of Richard. In a letter written in April to Motilal Roy, he says, “[Richard is not only] a personal friend of mine and a brother in the Yoga, but he wishes like myself, and in his own way works for a general renovation of the world by which the present European civilization shall be replaced by a spiritual civilization . . . He and Madame Richard are rare examples of European Yogins who have not been led away by Theosophical and other aberrations . . . I have been in material and spiritual correspondence with them for the last four years.”⁷ (This correspondence seems to be lost.) In the same letter he characterizes Richard as a European “who is practically an Indian in belief, in personal culture, in sympathies and aspirations, one of the *Nivedita* type.”

Did Aurobindo know who Richard essentially was, namely an incarnation of the Asura of Falsehood? Given his advanced yogic capabilities there can be no doubt that he knew; also, the relationship between Mirra and Richard must soon have become clear, if not disclosed confidentially by Mirra herself. If this is correct, then we can understand Aurobindo’s statement in a letter of 5 May that Richard “is to know nothing about Tantricism.”⁸ One may suppose that Aurobindo as a matter of course wanted to assist Mirra in her effort to convert Richard. For this kind of attempt, they had to take the whole being of the person to be converted into themselves and do his yoga of conversion for him, helping him to the threshold where the ultimate step then would have to be taken by the person himself. And so it came about that on the front page of the *Arya*, the journal heralding the New Age,

there are three names printed side by side: Sri Aurobindo Ghose and Paul and Mirra Richard.⁹

Of the four candidates for the one seat in the Chamber of Deputies in Paris, Paul Richard came a poor fourth with a ridiculously small number of votes to his name—in every polling station less than ten—while the winner, Paul Bluysen, got between 1,000 and 4,000. (It was this Bluysen whom Richard had come to support four years earlier.) “As for M. Richard’s votes,” wrote Sri Aurobindo to Motilal Roy, “they got rid of them in Pondicherry and Karikal by the simple process of reading Paul Bluysen wherever Paul Richard was printed. Even where he brought his voters in Karikal to the poll himself, the results were published ‘Richard—0 [zero].’”¹⁰

The disappointing results of the election notwithstanding, Richard intended “to stay in India for two years and work for the people,” according to the same letter. “He has sold one fourth of his wife’s fortune (a very small one) in order to be able to come and work for India, and the money he has can only carry him through the two years he thinks of staying here.” And this is when the three of them decided, on 1 June, to take up the considerable effort of publishing a review in English and French, the English edition of 1,000 copies to be called *Arya*, the French edition of 600 copies *Revue de la grande Synthèse*.

At first, however, the review was intended to be called *The New Idea/L’Idée nouvelle*. This title, doubtlessly proposed by Mirra, brings to mind the name of a Parisian group she had been leading quite recently. *Idea* in this case should be understood in its full Platonic sense as a supernatural reality with diverse effects in the material world. The proposed title shows us two things: first, that Mirra saw in Sri Aurobindo’s vision and realization a continuation and accomplishment of everything she herself had learned and realized before meeting him; second, that her knowledge contributed to his vision and his formulation



of that vision. Many key terms in his philosophy—such as psychic, mental, and vital, all to be found in *Words of Long Ago*—came to him from or via Mirra; and so did for instance his designation of the supermind as the “Real-Idea,” a term used in *The Life Divine* though rarely in later writings.

In the *programme* Mirra had made up, and which is published in *Words of Long Ago*, the third point reads, “To speak again to the world the eternal word under a new form adapted to its present mentality. It will be the synthesis of all human knowledge.” This is equivalent to what Sri Aurobindo too considered an essential part of his mission, “the intellectual side of my work for the world.” As he had said in his speech at Uttarpara, “He [God] has given me a word to speak and a work to do.”¹¹ “The eternal word,” the *sanatana dharma* he and Mirra had discovered in the respective traditions assimilated by them; “the new form” would be their new formulation of the eternal word, adapted and applicable to the present, pivotal stage of the universal evolution.

The date for the appearance of the first issue of the *Arya* was set for 15 August, Sri Aurobindo’s forty-second birthday. On 1 June 1914 Sri Aurobindo had nothing ready for the press. By the middle of the month, when the prospectus of the proposed journal was issued, he had worked up some of his Vedic material into the first of his “Selected Hymns.” Before 15 August, when *Arya*’s first issue was published, he had written one or more installments of four different books: *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Life Divine*, *The Isha Upanishad*, and *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

Two of these works, *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, are among the most important books of the twentieth century, an evaluation not lessened by the fact that still so few people know about them. “During the same two months that Sri Aurobindo performed this astounding intellectual la-

bor, he also saw to all the details of the production and distribution of the new review. The Mother meanwhile translated Sri Aurobindo’s articles for the French edition.”¹² She was also the chief executive in sole charge.¹³ Her experience of publishing Théon’s *Revue*

If you try to do so, you only make what the Mother calls mental constructions.”

A disciple asked, “Was the *Arya* with its thousands of pages written in this way?” Sri Aurobindo answered, “No, it was transmitted directly to the pen. It is a great relief to get out of the

Another of Mirra’s questions was why, in spite of her many talents, she had always been so “mediocre” in everything she did.

cosmique stood her in good stead. Richard contributed *The Wherefore of the Worlds* and *The Eternal Wisdom*, serials that Sri Aurobindo, in addition to the burden of his other work, had to translate from the French.

Sri Aurobindo was amply proving his theory that a yogi has to be able to turn his hand to anything. Still, he asserted that he was no philosopher.

“Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher,” he wrote to a disciple, “—although I have written philosophy, which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry—I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher. I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practicing Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically.”¹⁴

After the accident to his leg, many years later, he said to some disciples in his room, “If you mean thinking, I never do that. Thinking ceased a long time ago—it has stopped ever since that experience of mine with Lele, the Silence and Nirvana at Baroda. Thoughts, as I said, come to me from all sides and from above and the transmitting mind remains quiet or it enlarges to receive them. True thoughts always come in this way. You can’t think out such thoughts.

responsibility . . . I don’t mean responsibility in general, but of thinking about everything. Some thoughts are given, some are reflected from above. It is not that I don’t look for knowledge. When I want knowledge, I call for it. The higher faculty sees thoughts as if they were written on a wall.”¹⁵

About the meaning of the name *Arya*, printed like a hieroglyph in Devanagari script on the front page of the review, Sri Aurobindo wrote the following in one of the first issues:

“All the highest aspirations of the early human race, its noblest religious temper, its most idealistic velleities of thought are summed up in this single vocable . . . In later times, the word *Arya* expressed a particular ethical and social ideal, and ideal of well-governed life, candor, courtesy, nobility, straight dealing, courage, gentleness, purity, humanity, compassion, protection of the weak, liberality, observance of social duty, eagerness for knowledge, respect for the wise and learned, the social accomplishments. It was the combined ideal of the Brahmana [the learned priest] and the Kshatriya [the knight]. Everything that departed from this ideal, everything that tended towards the ignoble, mean, obscure, rude, cruel or false, was termed un-Aryan. There is no Word in human speech that has a nobler history.”¹⁶

And so it made itself heard, that



mighty voice at the beginning of the century:

“The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation—for it survives the longest periods of skepticism and returns after every banishment,—is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of the Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last,—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.”

This is the first paragraph on the first page in the first issue of the *Arya*. It is now still as much vibrant with life as it was at the time of writing, almost a century ago.

In the meantime the First World War had erupted.

cant as a trial run of what later would become the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. The reader will recall Mirra’s questions to Sri Aurobindo when she met him for the first time, especially the question about going the way at first alone or immediately taking others with them. The Mother would later say that making a choice had not been necessary, that the problem had been solved all by itself: some individuals had gathered around them, guided by their psychic instinct.

The first of these individuals were of course Sri Aurobindo’s companions, of whom the closest were Nolini Kanta Gupta, Bijoy Nag, Saurin Bose and Suresh Chakravarti, the first two still living under their aliases “Roy” and “Basak.” They had been joined by a young Tamil Brahmin from Pondicherry, K. Amrita. “With those who accompanied me or joined me in Pondicherry,” wrote Sri Aurobindo, “I had at first the relation of friends and companions rather than of a Guru and disciples; it was on the ground of politics that I had come to know them and not on the spiritual ground.”¹⁷ They usually had but lit-

in Pondicherry were some of the young men here . . . Sada, Benjamin, Jules Rassendren, David . . . Gradually they formed a group of Sri Aurobindo’s devotees. The strange thing about it was that they were all Christians. We did not have much of a response from the local Hindus, perhaps they were far too orthodox and old-fashioned. The Cercle Sportif was our rendezvous. There we had games, we arranged picnics, we staged plays, and also held study circles . . . Afterwards, when the Mother came in 1914, it was with a few men chosen from this group that she laid the first foundation of the work here: they formed the Society called ‘L’Idée nouvelle.’”¹⁸

The aim of the society was stated in the first issue of the *Arya*. “Its object is to group in a common intellectual life and fraternity of sentiment those who accept the spiritual tendency and idea it represents and who aspire to realize it in their own individual and social action . . . The Society has already made a beginning by grouping together young men of different castes and religions in a common ideal. All sectarian and political questions are necessarily foreign to its idea and activities. It is on a higher plane of thought superior to external differences of race, caste, creed and opinion and in the solidarity of the spirit that unity can be realized . . . The Society has its headquarters at Pondicherry with a reading-room and a library. A section has been founded at Karikal and others are likely to be opened at Yanam and Mahé [French territories dependent of the Pondicherry administration].”¹⁹

To bring in some money Mirra also set up a shop, called *Aryan Stores* and to be run by Saurin—who unluckily was not very business-minded. “A humble beginning for sure, but one that demanded a huge amount of energy from Mirra.

At first, the young men around Sri Aurobindo seem to have been rather distrustful towards that European lady, Madame Richard. “When it first came to be bruited that a Great Lady like this

At first, the young men around Sri Aurobindo seem to have been rather distrustful towards that European lady, Madame Richard.

Parallel to the activities around the founding of the *Arya*, Mirra started a new society called *The New Idea/L’Idée nouvelle*. This again makes it clear that she began working out her programme, of which the fourth point was, “Collectively, to establish an ideal society in a propitious spot for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God.” Although the lifetime of the new society would be short, something Mirra did not know when she started it, it was signifi-

tle money to spend and led their “bohemian life” in such an improvised way that Motilal Roy, on one of his visits from Chandernagore, was scandalized by the carelessness with which they looked after Sri Aurobindo.

Yet they played excellent football—football at the time and still in the present day being the favorite sport of the Calcuttans. In this way they befriended some of the youngsters from town. As Nolini writes in his *Reminiscences*, “Among our first acquaintances



was to come and live close to us,” writes Nolini, “we were faced with a problem: how should we behave? Should there be a change in our manners? For we had been accustomed to a bohemian sort of life, we dressed and talked, slept and ate and moved about in a free unfettered style, in a manner that would not quite pass in civilized society. Nevertheless, it was finally agreed that we should stick as far as possible to our old ways even under the new circumstances, for why should we permit our freedom and ease to be compromised or lost?”²⁰

As Amrita recalls of those days when he sought instruction from Madame Richard, “Had someone seen the Mother and myself seated on chairs, facing each other, almost as equals, with the book of *Yogic Sadhan* in hand, he would have been in a fix to know who was teaching whom.”²¹

Amrita was still a student belonging to the high and orthodox Vaishnava Brahmin caste. Since Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Pondicherry, he had felt strongly attracted to him for reasons he could not even rationalize. This caused a severe clash with his Brahmin father and relatives, for caste dress and customs were evidently foreign to everything Sri Aurobindo stood for. One night, during Amrita’s sleep, Nolini (on Sri Aurobindo’s instructions) cut off his *shikha*, the small tuft of hair on the shaven head of a Brahmin. “I got struck with fear. How should I dare look straight in the faces of my parents and relatives? A Brahmin youth without a shikha was no better than a pariah!” But he withstood the storm, became a member of the circle of intimates around Sri Aurobindo, who had helped him make the decisive step by cutting the symbolic tie with his past, and later a close collaborator of the Mother as one of the Ashram secretaries.

Because of Mirra’s deference to Sri Aurobindo, his young companions little by little realized who he actually was and how they should behave towards him. “The Mother came and installed Sri Aurobindo on his high pedestal of Master and Lord of Yoga,” writes Nolini.

“We had hitherto known him as a dear friend and close companion, and although in our mind and heart he had the position of a Guru, in our outward relations we seemed to behave as if he were just like one of ourselves. He too had been averse to the use of the words ‘Guru’ and ‘Ashram’ in relation to himself, for there was hardly a place in his work of new creation for the old traditional associations these words conveyed. Nevertheless, the Mother taught by her manner and speech, and showed us in actual practice, what was the meaning of disciple and master; she always practiced what she preached. She showed us, by not taking her seat in front of or on the same level as Sri Aurobindo, but by sitting on the ground, what it meant to be respectful to one’s Master, what was real courtesy.”²²

It is remarkable how this period of frantic activity was at the same time for Sri Aurobindo as well as for Mirra a period

of the most intensive spiritual practice. The *Record of Yoga* and the *Prayers and Meditations* both bear witness to this. There is no entry in Mirra’s diary dated 15 August 1914, Sri Aurobindo’s birthday and the day the first issue of the *Arya* appeared. There is however an entry on the very next day, showing that the problems had not abated one bit, but that they, and the inner struggle accompanying them, remained as acute as ever, if not more.

“When Thy force descends towards the earth in order to manifest [as it must have done on 15 August], each one of the great Asuric beings who have resolved to be Thy servitors but preserved their nature’s characteristic of domination and self-will, wants to pull it down for itself alone and distribute it to others afterwards; it always thinks it should be the sole or at least the supreme intermediary, and that the contact of all others with Thy Power cannot and should not be made except through its mediation. This unfortunate meanness is more or less conscious, but it is always there, delaying things indefinitely. If even for the greatest it is impossible in the integral manifestation to escape these lamentable limitations, why, O Lord, impose upon me the Calvary of this constraint? . . . If Thou willest that it be thus, Thou shouldst rend the last veil and Thy splendor come in all its purity and transfigure the world! Accomplish this miracle or else let me withdraw into Thee.”²³

For the reader it is impossible even to guess what may have caused this poignant outcry of the soul—as it was impossible in that Pondicherrian summer for their friends and acquaintances to guess the true relationship of Monsieur and Madame Richard.

End notes

1. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1956*, Collected Works of the Mother (CWM), vol. 8 (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust), p. 276.
2. *Questions and Answers 1955*, vol. 7, p. 414.
3. The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust), April 1989, p. 116.
4. The Mother, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 127.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), vol. 26 (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust), p. 374.
7. *Archives and Research*, April 1989, p. 117.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
9. This was the first time Aurobindo Akroyd Ghose took on the name “Sri Aurobindo,” though still accompanied by “Ghose.”
10. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
11. Sri Aurobindo, *Karmayogin*, SABCL, vol. 2, p. 2.
12. *Archives and Research*, April 1989, p. 119.
13. *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life I*, p. 144.



14. *On Himself*, p. 374.
15. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo III* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust), p. 119.
16. *Arya* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust), no. 2, 15 December 1914, p. 62.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
18. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Reminiscences* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust), p. 72.
19. *Arya*, no. 1, 15 August 1914, p. 58.
20. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Reminiscences*, p. 40.
21. K. Amrita, in *Reminiscences*, p. 180.
22. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Reminiscences*, pp. 63–64.
23. *Prayers and Meditations*, CWM, vol. 1, p. 220.

Georges Van Vrekhem is an author, translator, and Aurovilian who lived for eight years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. He is the author of the recent book, *Beyond the Human Species*. Georges will be visiting the United States in summer 2000 and attending the All USA Meeting. He can be reached at georges@auroville.org.in.

Review

Book: *The Savitri Legend: A Transformational Tale*, by Savitra (Alan Lithman). Sigo Press, 1999.

Review by Eric Hughes

Among devoted followers of yoga there have been many poets, artists, and musicians, but few novelists. Sri Aurobindo, a poet himself, nurtured many poets, but novelists among his followers are not so numerous.

Two prominent exceptions among his devotees are Satprem and Maggi Lidchi. Now we have Savitra, an American who was one of the earliest settlers in Auroville and author of *Auroville: The First Six Years* and *Sun-Word Rising*.

Savitri is the title of Sri Aurobindo's great epic poem, *Savitri, A Legend and a Symbol*, itself based on a brief episode in the *Mahabharata*. But there is a legend about another Savitri, and both these Savitri stories are recounted in this novel, as well as passages from Sri Aurobindo's epic.

It is interesting to see how sadhaks express their aspiration and experience in their lives and work. Here is a multi-layered story in which the Savitri legend is woven into the lives of the main characters.

The book opens with Michael, an American, and Chandra, his Anglo-Indian wife, returning to the scenes of their first meeting and courtship where their daughter Savitri was conceived.

They named her after the Savitri of the second legend, at a temple dedicated to her in Pushkar. During their trip, Michael and Chandra relive their early days and marriage, recalling the

two legends that were related to them. Then they proceed to Madras to meet their daughter, who is now mature.

In Madras, Savitri meets an American named Satyavan and falls in love with him. (Satyavan is the name of Savitri's spouse in Sri Aurobindo's poem also.) Satyavan has been living in the community of Auroville and wants to take Savitri there. When Savitri's parents arrive, she tells them that she does not want to return with

them to America but remain with the man she has fallen in love with. When she tells them his name her parents are appalled and her mother in particular is distressed, because they remember the legend. But Savitri is as adamant as the legend. Her parents leave and Savitri goes to Auroville with Satyavan. As in Sri Aurobindo's epic, Savitri, who has been told of the legend, begins to fear that Satyavan may die at the end of a year.

The balance of the book is taken up with Savitri's efforts to overcome her growing anxiety and find her true self, and her father's parallel attempts to write a *Savitri* book.

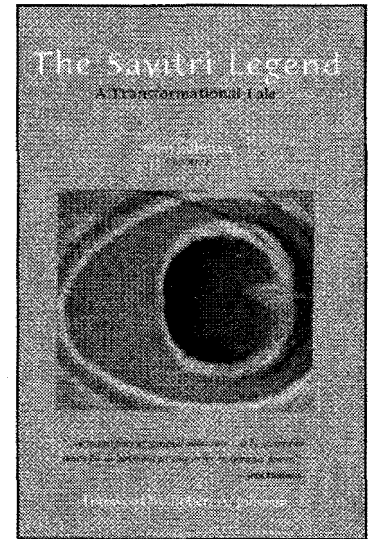
Savitra (Alan) received his spiritual name in India, as do two of the principal characters in this book. He is a skillful writer; for example he uses the device of two first-person narrators (denoted by two Sanskrit symbols) to make the story flow seamlessly.

He manages to evoke the atmosphere of India and also to depict inner experiences, especially Savitri's. It is quite an achievement that he has so subtly woven the Savitri legend throughout his tale, with its inspirational aspects as well as its tensions, culminating in the climactic experience of his Savitri.

Readers will look forward to see what Savitra produces next, with his skill as a writer and capacity to render spiritual experience.

The Savitri Legend is available for \$17.95 from Pondicherry shop (12 Tinker St., Woodstock, NY 12498; phone: 800-815-1969; e-mail: matagiri@aol.com); from Sigo Press (P.O. Box 1435, Ft. Collins, CO 80522; phone: 970-221-2055; or from Amazon books (<http://www.amazon.com>)). Savitra may be reached at savitra@earthlink.net.

The reviewer, Eric Hughes, is a writer who lives at Matagiri, "Mother's mountain," a center that has become a beacon of Sri Aurobindo's light near Woodstock, New York. He and Sam Spanier co-founded Matagiri with Mother's blessings in the late sixties. Eric can be reached at Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, 1218 Wittenberg Road, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457.





The poetry room

Hell and heaven

In the silence of the night-time,
 In the grey and formless eve
 When the thought is plagued with
 loveless
 Memories that it cannot leave,

When the dawn makes sudden beauty
 Of a peevish clouded sky,
 And the rain is sobbing slowly
 And the wind makes weird reply,

Always comes her face before me
 And her voice is in my ear,
 Beautiful and sad and cruel
 With the azure eyes austere.

Cloudy figure once so luminous
 With the light and life within
 When the soul came rippling outwards
 And the red lips laughed at sin,

Com'st thou with that marble visage
 From what world instinct with pain
 Where we pay the price of passion
 By a law our hearts disdain?

Cast it from thee, O thou goddess!
 Earning with a smile release
 From these sad imaginations,
 Rise into celestial peace.

Travel from the loveless places
 That our mortal fears create,
 Where thy natural heavens claim thee
 And the gods, thy brothers, wait.

Then descend to me grown radiant,
 Lighting up terrestrial ground
 With the feet that brighten heaven
 When the mighty dance goes round

And the high Gods beating measure
 Tread the maze that keeps the stars
 Circling in their luminous orbits
 Through the eternal thoroughfares.

All below is but confusion
 Of desires that strive and cry,
 Some forbidden, some achieving
 Anguish after ecstasy.

But above our radiant station
 Is from which by doubt we fell,
 Reaching only after Heaven
 And achieving only Hell.

Let the heart be king and master,
 Let the brain exult and toil,
 Disbelieve in good and evil,
 God with Nature reconcile.

Therefore, O rebellious sweetness,
 Thou tookst arms for joy and love.
 There achieve them! Take possession
 Of our radiant seats above.

—Sri Aurobindo

Give me wings

Give me wings and I shall rise
 Like dreamless flames of burning
 white,
 And pluck the gold of waking skies
 That glimmer in a mute delight.
 Light the heavens with azure bliss,
 Remove the darkness of the deep,
 Take me where the Spirit is,—
 My heart no more shall be asleep.
 Angels shall not faster fly
 If you, O Soul, my pilot be;
 I shall find the Heavens high
 And magic doors of Eternity.
 Touch me with your deathless fire
 And show me Truth's dire, steadfast
 eyes,
 Lift me from the doleful mire—
 O, give me wings and let me rise.

—Ranjit

About the poets

Sri Aurobindo wrote "Hell and heaven" sometime around 1930. It is reprinted here from Collected Poems, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, vol. 5, pp. 93-94.

Ranjit was a student at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre for Education (SAICE), where he wrote "Give me wings" in 1954. He currently resides in Europe.

Chandresh Patel is a member of the Sri Aurobindo Association. He lives in San Jose, California, where he manages a software company. He has an abiding interest in poetry as it relates to the Integral Yoga. He can be reached at cpatel@caesium.com.

Saiten was a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and a teacher at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre for Education (SAICE). His poem "Defeat of the 'I'" is reprinted with permission from Mother India, 1954.

Earth creature

I am thy lamp of sentience
 With aspiration for oil.
 I am the adventurer of truth
 Searching for a path to follow.
 I rappel into a cavern
 With faith for string.
 Blind long passage into void
 Darkness pressing to swallow.
 I slide in apprehension
 With meditation for J-hook.
 I reach the bottom invisible
 Pitch dark palpable tallow.
 I strike a match and behold,
 The eternal story ne'er told.

—Chandresh Patel,
 5 December 1999



Defeat Of the "I"

Forgotten is the soul's eternal bliss—
Death is my Lord, Desire my life-long mate;
To fight I have learnt, to wound, to kill and hate;
I embrace all misery with malicious kiss.
Love is unknown, humility I shun,
Arrogant I remain in my castle to reign
Supreme in dungeons dark with sorrow and pain,
Steeped in Ignorance—knowledge I have none.
Evils of worlds adorn in me their king,
Blind with might I mock at Destiny's face
As here across the world my measured pace
Circles the earth in an unbroken ring.
Enslaved am I to my own ego-might,
Burdened with beauties felt but never known;
I claim that freedom where the stars have grown
And my defeat will end soul's dreadful night.

—Sailen



Flower art by Elizabeth English



Source material

Sri Aurobindo on parts of the being

The psychic is not above but behind—its seat is behind the heart, its power is not knowledge but an essential or spiritual feeling—it has the clearest sense of the Truth and a sort of inherent perception of it which is of the nature of soul-perception and soul-feeling. It is our inmost being and supports all the others, mental, vital, physical, but it is also much veiled by them and has to act upon them as an influence rather than by its sovereign right of direct action; its direct action becomes normal and preponderant only at a high stage of development or by yoga.

It is not the psychic being which, you feel, gives you the intuitions of things to be or warns you against the results of certain actions; that is some part of the inner being, sometimes the inner mental, sometimes the inner vital, sometimes, it may be, the inner or subtle physical Purusha. The inner being—inner mind, inner vital, inner or subtle physical—knows much that is unknown to the outer mind, the outer vital, the outer physical, for it is in a more direct contact with the secret forces of Nature.

The psychic is the inmost being of all; a perception of truth which is inherent in the deepest substance of the consciousness, a sense of the good, true, beautiful, the Divine, is its privilege.

The central being—the Jivatman which is not born nor evolves but presides over the individual birth and evolution—puts forward a representative of himself on each plane of the consciousness. On the mental plane it is the true mental being, *manomaya purusa*, on the vital plane the true vital being, *pranamaya purusa*, on the physical plane the true physical being, *annamaya purusa*. Each being, therefore is, so long as the Ignorance lasts, centred round his mental, vital or physical Purusha, according

to the plane on which he predominantly lives, and that is to him his central being. But the true representative all the time is concealed behind the mind, vital and physical—it is the psychic, our inmost being.

When the inmost knowledge begins to come, we become aware of the psychic being within us and it comes forward and leads the sadhana. We become aware also of the Jivatman, the undivided Self or Spirit above the manifestation of which the psychic is the representative here.

—Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), vol. 22, pp. 269–270.

The phrase “central being” in our yoga is usually applied to the portion of the Divine in us which supports all the rest and survives through death and birth. This central being has two forms—above it is Jivatman, our true being, of which we become aware when

the higher self-knowledge comes,—below, it is the psychic being which stands behind mind, body and life. The Jivatman is above the manifestation in life and presides over it; the psychic being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it.

The natural attitude of the psychic being is to feel itself as the Child, the Son of God, the Bhakta; it is a portion of the Divine, one in essence, but in the dynamics of the manifestation there is always even in identity a difference. The Jivatman, on the contrary, lives in the essence and can merge itself in identity with the Divine; but it too, the moment it presides over the dynamics of the manifestation, knows itself as one centre of the multiple Divine, not as the Parameshwara. It is important to remember the distinction; for, otherwise, if there is the least vital egoism, one may being to think of oneself as an Avatar or lose balance like Hridaya with Ramakrishna.

—SABCL, vol. 22, pp. 265–66

Gnostic knots

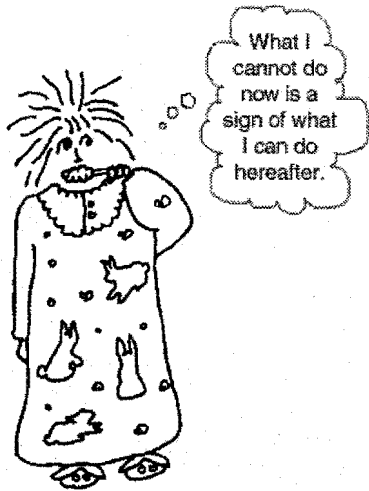


This is believed to be the only photo ever taken documenting the emergence of the psychic being! (Photo by David Hutchinson; yogini: Marta Belén)

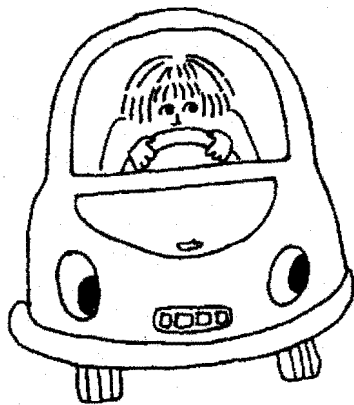


Future perfect

by Vishnu Eschner, David Hutchinson, and Lynda Lester



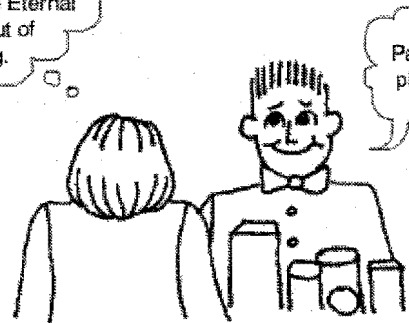
The sense of impossibility is the beginning of all possibilities.



Because this temporal universe was a paradox and an impossibility...



... therefore the Eternal created it out of His being.



Paper or plastic?

Main reasons people take up the Integral Yoga

1. Bored with samadhi, need a change of scene.
2. Wondering how to meet that ten-foot golden man with a beard they see floating above the counter at Starbucks coffee house.
3. Want a tropical yoga vacation in Pondicherry.
4. Can't see what else to do with those multiple Ph.D.s in physics, computer science, ancient languages, and philosophy.
5. Met a cute person from Auroville.
6. Tired of heaven, want to settle down on the earth plane.
7. Read about Ashram food on the Web.

How to spot a neo-auro-yogi

Frequent questions from newcomers to the yoga...

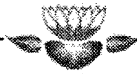
1. Does Sri Aurobindo still give interviews?
2. Will I still enjoy ice cream after my cells have been transformed?
3. Where can I find an English translation of the *Life Divine*?
4. Can I operate heavy machinery while under the influence of the higher mind?
5. Do I need a special initiation to learn how to levitate?

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Been through yogi school, and still have not mastered the basic siddhis? Take our guaranteed "Transformation in a Box"™ course! In ten easy lessons we take you from pathetic human to super-yogi, all without having to leave the comfort of your living room. Just think, no more bullying by those 100-level yogis. In no time at all you'll be thinking ten thoughts at once, chatting with the Paramatman, or your money back. Order today, and leave your old self behind!



Apropos



The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.—Eleanor Roosevelt

Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it.—Chinese proverb

If haste is the gas pedal, multitasking is overdrive.—James Gleick, *Faster*

I suddenly realized that all the good ideas I ever had came to me while I was milking a cow.—Grant Wood

Can you imagine that they used to have libraries where the books didn't talk to each other?—Marvin Minsky

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.—Edith Wharton

I find ecstasy in living—the mere sense of living is joy enough.—Emily Dickinson

You are so part of the world that your slightest action contributes to its reality. Your breath changes the atmosphere. Your encounters with others alter the fabrics of their lives, and the lives of those who come in contact with them.—Jane Roberts

A hasty man drinks tea with a fork.—Chinese proverb

The time has come to think beyond the Earth.—Vinton Cerf, 22 July 1998

Until I was twenty-five I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have unfolded within myself.—Hermann Melville

Computers are worthless. They only give you answers.—Pablo Picasso

Don't let the Muggles get you down!—J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

It's not that easy bein' green.—Kermit the frog

I always preferred having wings to having things.—Pat Schroeder, former U.S. congresswoman

If grass can grow through cement, love can find you at every time in your life.—Cher

Some people can tell what time it is by looking at the sun. But I have never been able to make out the numbers.—From an elementary school science essay



Two rabbis in the synagogue walk past a third rabbi. "Lord, I am nothing. Lord, I am nothing" says the praying rabbi. "Humph," says one of the other two, "Look who thinks he's nothing."—Jewish joke

Imagine this butterfly exactly as it is, but ugly instead of beautiful.—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Dost thou reckon thyself only a puny form, when within thee this universe is folded?—Baha'u'llah, quoting Imam Ali

S: Astrologers fear some catastrophic destruction on [13 February 1940], a great upheaval. But Jupiter and Venus are coming together on the twenty-first to counteract Mars and Saturn.

N: How can they counteract after the upheaval has taken place?

Sri Aurobindo: After the upheaval, there will be a deheaval?

N: Meenakshi's comment is: "See the goodness of God!"

S: I replied, "If God is good, why has He planned the destruction at all?"

Sri Aurobindo: In order that you may appreciate His goodness!

—Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 11 February 1940

Line art from Pedro J. Lemos' *Applied Art* (Pacific Press: 1920), a book for art students, teachers, and parents.