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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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SOME MEETINGS

&

SOME LETTERS

Sri Aurobindo

does not belong to the past nor to history.

Sri Aurobindo

is the Future advancing towards its realisation.

The Mother

Note

For this issue we have selected some of the interviews with Sri Aurobindo and some of Sri Aurobindo's early letters.

The reader will bear in mind that Sri Aurobindo's views in these letters reflect his position at that time, and that the interviews were noted from memory and therefore are not to be taken as Sri Aurobindo's exact words.

A LETTER OF 12 JULY 1911

I need some place of refuge in which I can complete my Yoga unassailed and build up other souls around me. It seems to me that Pondicherry is the place appointed by those who are Beyond, but you know how much effort is needed to establish the thing that is purposed upon the material plane. . . .

I am developing the necessary powers for bringing down the spiritual on the material plane, and I am now able to put myself into men and change them, removing the darkness and bringing light, giving them a new heart and a new mind. This I can do with great swiftness and completeness with those who are near me, but I have also succeeded with men hundreds of miles away. I have also been given the power to read men's characters and hearts, even their thoughts, but this power is not yet absolutely complete, nor can I use it always and in all cases. The power of guiding action by the mere exercise of will is also developing, but it is not so powerful as yet as the other. My communication with the other world is yet of a troubled character, though I am certainly in communication with some very great powers. But of all these things I will write more when the final obstacles in my way are cleared from the path.

What I perceive most clearly, is that the principal object of my Yoga is to remove absolutely and entirely every possible source of error and ineffectiveness, of error in order that the Truth I shall eventually show to men may be perfect, and of ineffectiveness in order that the work of changing the world, so far as I have to assist it, may be entirely victorious and irresistible. It is for this reason that I have been going through so long a discipline and that the more brilliant and mighty results of Yoga have been so long withheld. I have been kept busy laying down the foundation, a work severe and painful. It is only now that the edifice is beginning to rise upon the sure and perfect foundation that has been laid.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 283-84)



A LETTER OF 13 JULY 1911

Be very careful to follow my instructions in avoiding the old kind of politics. Spirituality is India's only politics, the fulfilment of the Sanatan Dharma its only Swaraj. I have no doubt we shall have to go through our Parliamentary period in order to get rid of the notion of Western democracy by seeing in practice how helpless it is to

make nations blessed. India is passing really through the first stages of a sort of national Yoga. It was mastered in the inception by the inrush of divine force which came in 1905 and aroused it from its state of complete tamasic ajnanam. But, as happens also with individuals, all that was evil, all the wrong sanskaras and wrong emotions and mental and moral habits rose with it and misused the divine force. Hence all that orgy of political oratory, democratic fervour, meetings, processions, passive resistance, all ending in bombs, revolvers and Coercion laws. It was a period of asuddha rajasic activity and had to be followed by the inevitable period of tamasic reaction from disappointed rajas. God has struck it all down, — Moderatism, the bastard child of English Liberalism; Nationalism, the mixed progeny of Europe and Asia; Terrorism, the abortive offspring of Bakunin and Mazzini. The latter still lives, but it is being slowly ground to pieces. At present, it is our only enemy, for I do not regard the British coercion as an enemy, but as a helper. If it can only rid us of this wild pamphleteering, these theatrical assassinations, these frenzied appeals to national hatred with their watchword of Feringhi-ko-marō, these childish conspiracies, these idiotic schemes for facing a modern army with half a dozen guns and some hundred lathis, — the opium visions of rajogun run mad, then I say, “More power to its elbow.” For it is only when this foolishness is done with that truth will have a chance, the sattwic mind in India emerge and a really strong spiritual movement begin as a prelude to India’s regeneration. No doubt, there will be plenty of trouble and error still to face, but we shall have a chance of putting our feet on the right path. In all I believe God to be guiding us, giving the necessary experiences, preparing the necessary conditions.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 170-71)



A LETTER OF 20 SEPTEMBER 1911

My Yoga is proceeding with great rapidity, but I defer writing to you of the results until certain experiments in which I am now engaged, have yielded fruit sufficient to establish beyond dispute the theory and system of yoga which I have formed and which is giving great results not only to me, but to the young men who are with me. . . . I expect these results within a month if all goes well.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, p. 284)

YUGAPURUSH SRI AUROBINDO

Motilal Roy (1882-1959) was a member of the secret revolutionary group in Chandernagore. It was he who received Sri Aurobindo and arranged for his stay in Chandernagore in 1910. He was also instrumental in providing financial help to Sri Aurobindo during the early stages of the Pondicherry period.

... The year 1911 was almost coming to an end. Living in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo continued giving instructions to the Bengal revolutionaries. In the last week of October 1911, I landed in Pondicherry with two local French political representatives. Due to the presence of Sri Aurobindo, the British police were keeping extra vigil on revolutionary leaders like Srinivas Iyengar and others in the city. Especially these secret policemen kept a very cautious eye whenever they spotted any Bengali person. I stayed with the French Government representatives in the famous Rangapoullée House near the market on Rue de Grand.

One afternoon I went out to watch the popular football match in the nearby ground of Odanjal [Odiansalai]. At this time Nolini Kanta and Sureshchandra alias Moni had come to participate in the football match. Sourindranath Basu, the brother-in-law of Sri Aurobindo also came to the ground for a walk. Here I managed to meet him discreetly. I had written to Sri Aurobindo about my coming to Pondicherry in a previous letter. On seeing me Sourindra made a sign that I should come out of the field and meet him a little farther away. We met on the way to the Botanical Gardens. We went to a tiled hut where we met a Madrasi student called Joseph David. Later he became a famous barrister and Mayor of Pondicherry. After introducing him to me, Sourindra left the place.

I saw Joseph David the next evening. He hired a ‘pousse-pousse’ and took me to meet Sri Aurobindo. He dressed me like a woman, with a scarf covering my face. The police who were guarding the house didn’t pay any attention as they found Joseph David entering the house with a woman. I saw a bunch of police detectives crowding around, but on seeing a woman they did not bother. Both of us entered the huge building. I encountered Nolini on the ground floor. Even that day I felt his heavenly friendship. He said, “Moni, (that is Sureshchandra), he is our cook today.” While asking about food, I got the answer, Khichdi is getting ready. A small kerosene lamp was flickering in the dark. Sureshchandra laughed and said, “There is not much problem with cooking, we feed ourselves with Khichdi every night.” Thinking about their poor standard of living, I climbed up and saw Sri Aurobindo right in front of the hall. Having his ‘darshan’ after a long time, I also received a touch of his heart’s affection.

He asked me affectionately, “How are you? How is your sadhana proceeding?” Sometime back he had sent me a few typed pages of ‘Yogic Sadhan’ to Chandernagore. The very first lines of those pages read — “There is no need of asana, pranayama

etc.” — Those words created some special obstruction for me. My sadhana was essentially based on effort. In those few pages he advised me to refrain from that. Of course a few more words of his — *maccittah sarvadurgaṇi mat prasādāt tariṣyasi* — used to give me a lot of strength in my work. He also wrote, “*Na me bhaktaḥ praṇasyati.*” In these words I even got rid of my fear of death. I always tried to keep myself steady by not trying to do any work by exerting. Discussing sadhana, the two of us came to a corner of the room in front of an old table and a few broken chairs. He sat on one of these chairs and asked me to sit down too. I saw that a few roasted peas were left on the table. It seems that this was what he used to have with his afternoon tea. After a longer scrutiny, I saw that he looked much thinner. The glow I had seen on him in Chandernagore had lost much of its shine. But the brightness of his eyes had increased much more, it seemed. His penetrating eyes gazed through me as if he could size up the state of my sadhana; then he asked me about the different aspects of revolutionary activities in Bengal. Before I took leave of him he said, “It won’t be proper for you to come here everyday. You have to do a lot of work, going back to Bengal. See me only twice a week. It is Tuesday today, come again next Friday, we will talk some more.”

He came along with me and saw me off from the top of the stairs. . . I went downstairs thinking constantly about how he was living.

. . . I used to see Sri Aurobindo every Tuesday and Friday at his house following that secret route. Talks about revolutionary activities were finished within a few days. Then in the following weeks he used to speak continuously only about spiritual sadhana. I took his words through my ears into my heart. Hathayoga, Rajayoga, Tantra, Sahajiya — and above all my mind was enlightened by the “Atmasamarpana” yoga of the Gita as I heard the mahamantra from his mouth. “You need not do Asana and Pranayama.” On his advice I stopped them. The three mantras he gave me for japa, included, “*tvayā Hṛiṣikeṣa hr̥di sthitena yathā niyuktosmi tatha karomi.*”

By chanting *Hṛiṣikeṣa* I could not imagine anyone but Sri Aurobindo. While eating, sleeping I always remembered him — even when I embarked on any dangerous activity, I followed the advice of this *Hṛiṣikeṣa* directly.

During my sickness I remembered this *Hṛiṣikeṣa*. When the time came for me to leave, he felt what was in my heart. Then he took out a bunch of papers, handed them over to me saying, “You will get the directions for your sadhana more explicitly from these. The typed papers that I sent you previously were not exactly mine. I received those words from Raja Ram Mohun Roy through meditation and wrote them down accordingly. After that these are written from my own experiences — you will benefit a lot from it.”

After that I went back to my room, I saw the heading on the written sheets, “Yoga and its Object”.

(Translated by Gopa Bose from the original Bengali *Yugapurush Sri Aurobindo*, by Motilal Roy, published by Prabartak Publication, Calcutta.)

ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL'S RECOLLECTIONS

Alexandra David-Néel (1868-1969) was a French explorer, a student of Buddhism, author, seeker. She was the first woman to visit the forbidden city of Lhasa.

Extract from a letter to her husband (27 November 1911):

. . . First I was in Pondicherry. There also I was reminded of Versailles: a dead city that had once been something and remembered it, rigid in its dignity, irreproachably correct, concealing beneath an impeccable coat of whitewash the cracks in the old walls. My hotel too sported a splendid coat of whitewash on its facade, but the interior was in serious need of a good sweeping. I spent the night in a filthy hole. Rats scuttled across the room, which in the morning was littered with their excrement. Fortunately the day was lovely, and I was able to go about the whole afternoon in some nameless prehistoric contraption pushed by four blacks. I took a photograph of it and I will send it to you as soon as I make a print.

In the evening I had a conversation with a Hindu about whom I may never have spoken to you, since I have not been in correspondence with him, but know him only through the good opinion of friends. I spent two wonderful hours reviewing the ancient philosophical ideas of India with a man of rare intelligence. He belongs to that uncommon category that I so much admire, the reasonable mystics. I am truly grateful to the friends who advised me to visit this man. He thinks with such clarity, there is such lucidness in his reasoning, such lustre in his eyes, that he leaves one with the impression of having contemplated the genius of India such as one dreams it to be after reading the noblest pages of Hindu philosophy.

I knew that this philosopher had taken a political stance that was not pleasing to the British, but naturally I was discreet enough not to speak of that. Besides, we were soaring far above politics. But while we soared, others were content to remain on the ground. I am speaking of the English police. When I arrived in Madras the head of the C.I.D. was waiting for me in person. He asked me — very civilly and politely, I must say — what I had been doing in Pondicherry in the house of this suspicious character. I was not surprised. I knew in advance that my visit would be taken note of. Moreover I made no efforts to conceal it.

Good Heavens, how petty and paltry it all seems — their agitation, their cowardliness, their distress. What a different atmosphere there was in that silent house in Pondicherry! Through it passed the breath of the things that are eternal. In the calm evening, seated by a window that looked out over the rather funereal gardens of this defunct city, it seemed as if we could see beyond life and death. . . . And when I think of the proud disdain with which he seems to regard the couch of the ascetic, which beckons me even now, and of his promise of dreams other than those that haunt the

feverish brains of these poor lunatics! . . .

(Journal de voyage: lettres à son mari [11 août 1904-27 décembre 1917], by Alexandra David-Néel, published by Plon, Paris, 1975, pp. 68-70. Translated from the French.)

*

Extract from a letter to her husband (19 December 1911):

. . . One of these days I'm going to write to that Hindu of Pondicherry I mentioned earlier. He has a keen power of analysis, and a critical turn of mind. . . . Calling his attention to the experiments he himself is conducting with careful and meticulous control, I will ask him: "Am I entering *samādhi*, am I really touching Nirvana, or is it just fatigue, or perhaps my sensations are being dulled by age? . . . Are my indifference, my beatitude, of a transcendental kind, or is it only torpor, the beginning of my decline?" . . . I imagine that the question will make him laugh, as he laughed so sweetly the day I told him, in regard to something similar: "One reaches a point where one no longer knows whether one is becoming prodigiously wise, or taking leave of one's senses. . . ."

(Ibid., pp. 75-76)

*

Extract from a letter to her husband (14 February 1912):

. . . This morning I went to Government House [in Calcutta]. I am going to be given a set of letters of introduction and recommendations which will continue to facilitate access to many things and many people. Of course it was known, here too, that I had been to Pondicherry and seen Aurobindo Ghose. I had no idea he was such an important man. If I had known, I would have tried to make him speak on politics to see what sort of political ideas would germinate in the brain of a Vedantic mystic. But though I knew he had been involved in a political trial, I did not know the precise reason. This morning the private secretary to the Viceroy told me, "I think he considers our civilisation, our education and all our modern progress to be godless, and therefore condemns them." This may very well be. Hindus look at the world from a different angle than we do. If our interview had not been limited to a few hours at twilight, in the monastic house in Pondicherry, I might have picked his brain and discovered where the cracks in our Western materialistic civilisation lie. . . . But it may be that I owe a beautiful memory to my being insufficiently informed about him — false and illusory, no doubt, like most beautiful memories: the vast empty room, the window open on the mauve sky of evening, and Aurobindo Ghose and I speaking of the supreme Brahman,

the eternal existence, and for a moment crossing the threshold of the Beyond, where life and death cease, and living the dream of the Upanishads. . . .

(*Ibid.*, pp. 100-01)

*

A portion from her reminiscences of India:

The train carrying me to Madras halted. It was one of the big expresses. The porters jostled one another, grabbing at the voluminous baggage of the *sahibs* — in those days all whites were *sahibs*, “masters”. I allowed a little time for those in more of a hurry than I to leave their compartments, and then got down. Before I could take three steps on the platform a well-dressed Englishman came forward and greeted me. He gave my name an English pronunciation: “Mrs. Nil?”. I was not surprised that this gentleman had come to meet me. I was going to stay with some orientalist friends of mine who lived in the great estate owned by the Theosophical Society in Adyar, in the vicinity of Madras. The man who accosted me presumably had been sent by them with instructions to take me to my destination. But as it was already late in the afternoon, I preferred to sleep at the hotel, which was located right in the station, and not to go to Adyar until the next day. This I explained in a few words to the gentleman. But whether he answered or not, I could not hear a thing. Then we were separated by the noisy crowd of travellers. He rejoined me at the door of the hotel, and went ahead to ask for a good room, and to order some tea. I was absolutely convinced that he had been sent by my friends. Accordingly I gave him a friendly smile, and asked: “Do you live at Adyar? You must be a member of the Theosophical Society.” He seemed a little amused by my question, but answered with perfect courtesy: “No, I am the chief of police.”

I was of course surprised, but not as much as I might have been. I was coming from Pondicherry, where I had met Aurobindo Ghose. Sri Aurobindo has become the greatest of the Indian gurus of the intellectual type, admired and venerated by the elite of his compatriots, but at the time he was only a politician fighting the British who had taken refuge in French territory.

“I thought it preferable to come myself instead of sending a subordinate,” said the chief of police. I was thankful for this courtesy. “Please take your tea,” he said. Five o’clock tea is, of course, a sacred rite for the English.

I told the chief of police that no interrogation was necessary. He knew quite well that I had come from Pondicherry and who I had seen there. That was why he was here. He acknowledged that he was aware of my case. I showed him letters issued to me by the India Office in London for the Viceroy and the Governors of the Indian provinces. This seemed to set his mind at ease; such an insignificant person as I could pose but little danger to the British domination of India. Nevertheless I added: “I had

heard of Aurobindo Ghose as a distinguished philosopher, and it is as such that I wished to see him and speak to him.” “He certainly is a very remarkable scholar,” conceded the chief of police. “But he is a dangerous man. We hold him responsible for the recent assassination of Mr. Ashe.” It appears that Mr. Ashe, of whom I had never heard, was an English official. I replied simply that it seemed very improbable that the learned man who had spoken to me so knowledgeably on philosophical topics was an assassin. “He certainly did not kill Mr. Ashe himself,” replied the chief of police. “He had him killed.”

I was not at all keen to poke my nose into the activities of the Indian revolutionaries, and the conversation ended there.

(L'Inde où j'ai vécu by Alexandra David-Néel, published by Plon, Paris, 1951, pp. 222-24. Translated from the French.)

*

Letter from the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge to David-Néel, 11 March 1912:

VICEROY'S CAMP, INDIA

11 March 1912

Madam,

Thank you for your letter and for the explanations it contains.

I am sure you can understand that it is very difficult for a Government to know whether the relations of an individual with a political refugee are of a political or philosophical nature. In any event I fully accept your assurances that your interest in a certain person in Pondicherry was purely philosophical. If I had not been convinced of this I would not have had letters of recommendation to the British authorities issued to you.

I wish you success in your philosophical investigations in India.

Yours faithfully,

Hardinge of Penhurst.

(From Mlle Marie-Madeleine Peyronnet, Fondation Alexandra David-Néel,
Digne, France. Translated from the French.)

*(All the above material in connection with Alexandra David-Néel has been taken
from the April 1987 issue of Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research.)*



A LETTER OF JUNE 1912 (circa)

. . . I cannot understand why on earth people should make up their minds that I have become a Sannyasin! I have even made it clear in the public Press that I have not taken Sannyasa but am practising Yoga [. . .]. The Yoga I am practising has not the ghost of a connection with Sannyasa. It is a Yoga meant for life & life only. Its object is perfection of the moral condition & mental & physical being along with the possession of certain powers — the truth of which I have been establishing by continuous practical experiment, — with the object of carrying out a certain mission in life which God has given me. Therefore there is or ought to be no difficulty on that score. If I were a Sannyasin, there would indeed be no money difficulty to solve.

The question about the siddhi is a little difficult to answer precisely. There are four parts of the siddhi, roughly, moral, mental, physical & *practical*. Starting from December 1908 the moral has taken me three years and a half and may now be considered complete. The mental has taken two years of regular sadhana and for the present purpose may be considered complete; the physical is backward and nearing completion only in the immunity from disease — which I am now attempting successfully to perfect & test by exposure to abnormal conditions. The physical also does not matter so much for practical purposes, as the moral, mental and a certain number of practical siddhis are sufficient. It is these practical siddhis that alone cause delay. I have had first to prove to myself their existence and utility, secondly to develop them in myself so as to be working forces, thirdly to make them actually effective for life & impart them to others. The development will, I think, be complete in another two months, but the application to life & the formation of my helpers will take some time — for the reason that I shall then have a greater force of opposition to surmount than in the purely educative exercises I have hitherto practised. The full application to life will, I think, take three years more, but it is only for a year of that time (if so long) that I expect to need outside assistance. I believe that I may have to stay in French India for another year. I presume that is what the question about my future means. But on this point also I cannot speak with certainty. If, however, it refers to

my future work, that is a big question & does not yet admit of a full answer. I may say briefly that I have been given a religious & philosophical mission, to re-explain the Veda & Vedanta (Upanishads) in the ancient sense which I have recovered by actual experience in Yoga and to popularise the new system of Yoga (new in arrangement & object) which has been revealed to me & which, as I progress, I am imparting to the young men staying with me & to others in Pondicherry; I have also to spread certain ideas about God & life by literary work, speech & practice, to try & bring about certain social changes &, finally, to do a certain work for my country, in particular, as soon as the means are put in my hands. All this to be done by God's help only & not to be begun till things & myself are ready. [. . .]

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 172-74)



PROFESSOR D. L. PUROHIT'S VISIT

D. L. Purohit was deputed by H. H. the Gaekwar of Baroda to study various religious and social activities of the United Kingdom. He visited some countries on the Continent and Egypt. He then began a tour of India to study similar activity in this country.

When he came to Madras he learnt that Pondicherry is only a few miles from the main line and wished to see how French laws work in connection with Hindu temples and under Indian conditions.

According to the information he had, Sri Aurobindo had already left for Paris.

From D. L. Purohit's letter of explanation dated 12.9.1912:

When I came to Conjeeveram I decided to go to Pondicherry as I had nothing to fear from C.I.D. as my work was confined purely to the study of social and religious activities and as there would be no other opportunity to see the practical working of these laws in India and thus to test the propriety of my proposals re registration of institutions, prevention of mendicancy &c [. . .] I resolved to go to Pondicherry.

I reached it at about 2 A.M. on the 23rd of July and slept in the waiting room at night. In the morning I went to a native rest house at about 8 or 9 A.M. I had my bath and then went to the Perumal Coil and other temples and mutts & talked to various people, Nagar Chetty and others, as to the control of Hindu temples & c.

I then went to the Secretariat in a Riksha. When I reached the Secretariat I was told that the secretary was not in the office but that he might be at home. I was told he lived in the vicinity. Meanwhile a man in European costume came where I was standing and asked me whether I wished to see the secretary.

I said: Yes.

He said: Very well, let me try at his place.

I followed him and the riksha followed us. Within 2 or 3 minutes he asked me whether I had a card with me.

I — Yes.

I handed over my visit card to him. He read it & said:

He — Oh! You come from Baroda.

I — Yes.

He — Well, do you know Mr Aravinda Ghose?

I — Yes.

He — Will you like to see him?

I — No, thanks. He is I think in Paris.

He — Yes, alright. He is in Paris. Meanwhile he had handed over my card to a man who had dressed like a cooly. He stopped near a house. I also stopped and the cooly went up.

I — Is this the house of the Secretary?

He — Yes.

The cooly returned in a few seconds & told me *sāheb bulātā hai*.

I — The Secretary is a good man.

He — Yes, he is very kind. I must go up to see him.

The cooly asked me for *bakshīs*. I declined. I stepped in. And a man on the staircase showed me in.

To my utter surprise I found myself in presence of Mr Ghose. He was also astonished to see me there.

G — What brings you here?

I — I thought you were in Paris.

I showed him the circular printed letter of my questions. Had it not been for the sake of good manners and courtesy due to one who was for sometime my official superior I would have returned from him unceremoniously. I never dreamt that any mischievous interpretation was likely to be placed on this occurrence.

He read the questions and made some observations. The very full memo thereof is enclosed herewith.

Ordinarily the discussion of these questions lasts 2 hours or more e.g. with Sir Subrahmanya Aiyer, with Sir Gurudass Banerjee &c. But here as I put no questions, it terminated in about 25 or 30 minutes.

Extract from D. L. Purohit's journal dated 23.7.12:

Mr. Ghose after reading various questions of the circular letter, talked of Yoga — not the conventional method of *Patanjali* but the natural method on which he stumbled upon in his meditations. He believed that egoism would vanish if we were to put ourselves on a higher plane which we can do by allowing ourselves to be only servants of God. First His will will be our will. His knowledge will be our knowledge. This state has given him & his disciples perfect peace. He wanted to systematize it for himself and at a later stage would like to publish his experiences after verification by others. He could annihilate time and space which are merely conventional. There is a reality. He could faintly read the future. He could now read *ākāśa* indications. He believed in predestination, physiognomy & in astrology. Stars are to be taken not as causes but as indicators of tendencies.

He is not in favour of monastic institutions though it serves as a centre of individual development and is a precious heritage. He believed in *varṇa* as a rough classification of men, e.g. *brāhmaṇa* having *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra* elements as predominating. He believed in *anuṣṭhāna*. He now does not think before writing. He does not move his hands. He is the complete instrument of [the] eternal and infinite one. Sometimes desires would survive but by efforts they do evaporate and we are able to distinguish between the right & wrong. Out of *manas*, *citta*, *buddhi*, *abhimāna* he found by experience *buddhi* more important. *Mahat* becomes *aḥaṅkāra* & egoism is the result. The infinite can help the individual best when the latter knows how to become a complete instrument of Him. He was for religious instruction. He emphasised history of religions & comparative study of religion as the basis. He thought such lectures to the pupil-teachers as good. He thought our priests, temples & religious orders were hopeless. If possible to enlist their sympathy, colleges will be useful.

Certainly a bureau is necessary. He would like to have committees to organise & supervise charity work and to control or to supervise religious endowments. He was against vagrancy law.

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Prof. Purohit's visit had certain repercussions. He was compelled to resign. Here is a portion of his letter dated 26.11.1912:

Your Excellency,

As I am extremely grieved at the manner in which my visit to Pondicherry undertaken in the conscientious discharge of the work connected with the study of the religious & social institutions and activities, has unfortunately been misconstrued in certain quarters, in spite of my candid and unreserved explanation, I feel in all

consciousness that I ought no longer, under the undeserved treatment accorded to me, to continue in the service of the State.

2. I therefore most humbly and respectfully beg to tender my resignation of the post of a professor in the Baroda College from the 3rd January next when the College reopens after the present vacation.

I am
Your Excellency's
Most humble & obedient Servant
D. L. Purohit

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Regarding this incident, A. B. Purani records:

When the talk turned to Prof. D. L. Purohit of Baroda Sri Aurobindo recounted the incident of his visit to Pondicherry where he had come to inquire into the relation between the Church and the State. He had paid a courtesy call on Sri Aurobindo as he had known him at Baroda. This had resulted in his resignation from Baroda State service on account of the pressure of the British Residency. I conveyed to Sri Aurobindo the good news that after his resignation Mr. Purohit had started practice as a lawyer and had been quite successful, earning more than the pay he had been getting as a professor.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo, 2007 Ed. p. 18)

(All the material regarding Professor D. L. Purohit has been taken from the April 1987 issue of Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research.)



A LETTER OF AUGUST 1912 (circa)

15th August is usually a turning point or a notable day for me personally either in sadhana or life — indirectly only for others. This time it has been very important for me. My subjective sadhana may be said to have received its final seal and something like its consummation by a prolonged realisation & dwelling in Parabrahman for many hours. Since then, egoism is dead for all in me except the Annamaya Atma, — the physical self which awaits one farther realisation before it is entirely liberated from occasional visitings or external touches of the old separated existence.

My future sadhan is for life, practical knowledge & shakti, — not the essential knowledge or shakti in itself which I have got already — but knowledge & shakti established in the same physical self & directed to my work in life. I am now getting a clearer idea of that work & I may as well impart something of that idea to you; since you look to me as the centre, you should know what is likely to radiate out of that centre.

1. To reexplain the Sanatana Dharma to the human intellect in all its parts, from a new standpoint. This work is already beginning, & three parts of it are being clearly worked out. Sri Krishna has shown me the true meaning of the Vedas, not only so but he has shown me a new Science of Philology showing the process & origins of human speech so that a new Nirukta can be formed & the new interpretation of the Veda based upon it. He has also shown me the meaning of all in the Upanishads that is not understood either by Indians or Europeans. I have therefore to reexplain the whole Vedanta & Veda in such a way that it will be seen how all religion arises out of it & is one everywhere. In this way it will be proved that India is the centre of the religious life of the world & its destined saviour through the Sanatana Dharma.

2. On the basis of Vedic knowledge to establish a Yogic sadhana which will not only liberate the soul, but prepare a perfect humanity & help in the restoration of the Satyayuga. That work has to begin now but will not be complete till the end of the Kali.

3. India being the centre, to work for her restoration to her proper place in the world; but this restoration must be effected as a part of the above work and by means of Yoga applied to human means & instruments, not otherwise.

4. A perfect humanity being intended society will have to be remodelled so as to be fit to contain that perfection.

You must remember that I have not given you the whole Yogic sadhana. What I have given you is only the beginning. [. . .]

I have also begun, but on a very small scale the second part of my work which will consist in making men for the new age by imparting whatever siddhi I get to those who are chosen. From this point of view our little colony here is a sort of seed plot & a laboratory. The things I work out in it, are then extended outside. Here the work is progressing at last on definite lines and with a certain steadiness, not very rapid; but still definite results are forming. [. . .]

What you say about the Ramakrishna Mission is, I dare say, true to a certain extent. [. . .] Remember also that we derive from Ramakrishna. For myself it was Ramakrishna who personally came & first turned me to this Yoga. Vivekananda in the Alipore jail gave me the foundations of that knowledge which is the basis of our sadhana.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 177-79)

A LETTER OF 18 DECEMBER 1912

A great silence and inhibition of action has been the atmosphere of my Yoga for the last year and it is only now beginning to lift from me. The most serious part of my difficulties, — the inward struggle, — is over; I have conquered, or rather One whose instrument I am has conquered for me. I am turning now to the outward struggle, preparing my powers for it, awaiting the time and the signal to begin. The details I will not write to you now; the hour has not yet struck; for the enemy in the subtle parts of the material world, although beaten, is still struggling desperately to prevent my Yoga materialising in the objective plane. I await the issue of the struggle, towards which every day of the Yoga brings me nearer with a long stride.

*

In spite of that, however, my work in its foundations proceeds. There are means in this world, fortunately for the humanity, which Govts & authorities cannot touch or prevent. For the outward work, I see now, why it has been held back. It was necessary for me to have myself a perfect knowledge & power before I seriously undertook it. My knowledge and my power are now making rapid strides towards the necessary perfection and, once that is secured, it will be impossible for the material difficulties to remain.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 284-85)



A LETTER OF JANUARY 1913 (circa)

. . . All these matters, as well as the pursuance of my work to which you allude in your last (commercial) letter, depend on the success of the struggle which is the crowning movement of my sadhana — viz the attempt to apply knowledge & power to the events and happenings of the world without the necessary instrumentality of physical action. What I am attempting is to establish the normal working of the siddhis in life ie the perception of thoughts, feelings & happenings of other beings & in other places throughout the world without any use of information by speech or any other data. 2^d, the communication of the ideas & feelings I select to others (individuals, groups, nations,) by mere transmission of will-power; 3^d, the silent compulsion on them to act according to these communicated ideas & feelings; 4th, the determin-

ing of events, actions & results of action throughout the world by pure silent will power. When I wrote to you last, I had begun the general application of these powers which God has been developing in me for the last two or three years, but, as I told you, I was getting badly beaten. This is no longer the case, for in the 1st, 2^d & even in 3rd I am now largely successful, although the action of these powers is not yet perfectly organized. It is only in the 4th that I feel a serious resistance. I can produce single results with perfect accuracy, I can produce general results with difficulty & after a more or less prolonged struggle, but I can neither be sure of producing the final decisive result I am aiming at nor of securing that orderly arrangement of events which prevents the results from being isolated & only partially effective. In some directions I seem to succeed, in others partly to fail & partly to succeed, while in some fields, eg, this matter of financial equipment both for my personal life & for my work I have hitherto entirely failed. When I shall succeed even partially in that, then I shall know that my hour of success is at hand & that I have got rid of the past karma in myself & others, which stands in our way & helps the forces of Kaliyuga to baffle our efforts.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 181-82)



A LETTER OF FEBRUARY 1913

. . . But just now, I find every forward step to be made is violently combated & obstinately obstructed. Our progress is like the advance of a modern regiment under fire in which we have to steal a few yards at a run & then lie down under covert & let the storm of bullets sweep by. I neither hope for nor see yet any prospect of a more successful rapidity.

I have been lying down under covert ever since the middle of February, after a very brilliant advance in January & the early part of February. I keep the positions gained, but can make as yet no sure progress farther. There is only a slow preparation for farther progress. The real difficulty is to bring force, sureness & rapidity into the application of power & knowledge to life, — especially sureness, — for it is possible to bring force & rapidity, but if not attended by unflinching sureness of working, they may lead to great errors in knowledge & great stumbles & disasters in action which counteract the successes. On the other hand, if sureness has to be gained only by not stepping except where everything is sure (which is the first stage of action & knowledge

necessary to get rid of rajasic rashness) progress is likely to be slow. I am trying to solve the dilemma.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, p. 184)



A LETTER OF 29 AUGUST 1914

. . . We gain nothing by preaching an unconditional loyalty to the Government, such as is the fashion nowadays, or doing anything which even in appearance strengthens the disposition towards an abject & unmanly tone in politics. Gandhi's loyalism is not a pattern for India which is not South Africa, & even Gandhi's loyalism is corrected by passive resistance. An abject tone of servility in politics is not "diplomacy" & is not good politics. It does not deceive or disarm the opponent; it does encourage nervelessness, fear & a cringing cunning in the subject people. What Gandhi has been attempting in S. Africa is to secure for Indians the position of kindly treated serfs, — as a stepping-stone to something better. Loyalty + Ambulance Corps mean the same thing in India. But the conditions of India are not those of S. Africa; our position is different & our aim is different, not to secure a few privileges, but to create a nation of men fit for independence & able to secure & keep it. We have been beaten in the first attempt, like every other nation similarly circumstanced. That is no reason why the whole people should go back to a condition of abject fear, grovelling loyalty & whining complaints. The public Nationalist policy has always been

1. Eventual independence
2. No cooperation without control.
3. A masculine courage in speech & action

Let us add a fourth,

4. Readiness to accept real concessions & pay their just price, but no more. Beyond that, I do not see the necessity of any change. We recognise that immediate independence is not practicable & we are ready to defend the British rule against any foreign nation, for that means defending our own future independence.

Therefore, if the Government accepts volunteers or favours the institution of Boy-Scouts, we give our aid, but not to be mere stretcher-bearers.

That is the side of principle; now let us look at that of policy.

(1) I don't appreciate Sarat Maharaj's position. If self-sacrifice is the object, every human being has the whole of life as a field for self-sacrifice & does not depend on any Government for that. We can show our sacrificing activities every moment, if

we want. It is not a question of sacrifice at all, it is a question of military training. If the young men wish to organise for charitable work, the Government is not going to stop it, even though they may watch and suspect. I put that aside altogether.

(2) The leaders suggested cooperation in return for some substantial self-government. They are now offering cooperation without any return at all. Very self-sacrificing, but not political. If indeed, Gov^t were willing to train “thousands of young men” in military service as volunteers, Territorials or boy-scouts, whether for keeping the peace or as a reserve in case of invasion, then we need not boggle about the return. But, after so much experience, do these addle-headed politicians think the Gov^t. is going to do that except in case of absolute necessity and as a choice between two evils? When will that absolute necessity come? Only if the war goes against them seriously & they have to withdraw their troops from India. I shall discuss that point later on.

(3) Meanwhile what have the Government done? After testing the temper of the people &, you may be sure, watching closely what young men came forward as volunteers & who did not, they have removed an offer which had already been whittled down to a mere harmless Ambulance Corps in which the young men have plenty of chances of getting killed, but none of learning real warfare. Mere common sense warns us not to trust such an administration & to think ten times before accepting its offers. We know Lord Hardinge’s policy; (1) sweet words, (2) quiet systematic coercion, (3) concession where obstinacy would mean too great a row & too much creation of deep-seated hostility.

Having prefaced so much, let us look at the utility of the things offered us or offered by us.

1. Ambulance Corps —

The only possible utilities would be two, (1) to train two thousand young men to be steady under fire (2) to train them to act together under discipline in an easy but dangerous service. Now it is quite possible for us to create courage in our young men without these means, & I hope our best men, or let me say, our men generally do not need to become stretcher bearers in a European war in order to have the necessary nerve, courage, steadiness & discipline. If therefore an Ambulance Corps is again suggested & accepted, either refuse or let only those young men go who are enthusiastic, but still lightheaded, self-indulgent or undisciplined. Possibly, the experience may steady & discipline them. It may be necessary to let this be done, if the circumstances are such that to refuse entirely would reflect on our national courage or be interpreted as a backing out from a national engagement.

2. Boy-Scouts — Volunteer Corps — Territorials.

All these are entirely good, provided the police are kept at a distance, & provided officers as well as men are trained & the Gov^t. control is limited to the giving of military discipline in the first two cases. Even without the second proviso, any of these things would be worth accepting.

Only in the case of volunteers going to the scene of war, you must see that we are not crippled by all our best men or even a majority being sent; only enough to bring in an element among us who have seen actual warfare –

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I think any of these things may one day become possible. Since the last year, new forces have come into the world and are now strong enough to act, which are likely to alter the whole face of the world. The present war is only a beginning not the end. We have to consider what are our chances & what we ought to do in these circumstances.

The war is open to a certain number of broad chances.

I. Those bringing about the destruction of the two Teutonic empires, German & Austrian.

This may happen either by an immediate German defeat, its armies being broken & chased back from Belgium & Alsace-Lorraine to Berlin, which is not probable, or by the Russian arrival at Berlin & a successful French stand near Rheims or Compiègne, or by the entry of Italy & the remaining Balkan states into the war & the invasion of Austro-Hungary from two sides.

II. Those bringing about the weakening or isolation of the British power.

This may be done by the Germans destroying the British expeditionary force, entering Paris & dictating terms to France while Russia is checked in its march to Berlin by a strong Austro-German force operating in the German quadrilateral between the forts of Danzig, Thorn, Posen and Königsberg. If this happens Russia may possibly enter into a compact with Germany based on a reconciliation of the three Empires and a reversion to the old idea of a simultaneous attack on England and a division of her Empire between Germany & Russia.

III. Those bringing about the destruction of British power.

This may happen by the shattering of the British fleet and a German landing in England.

In either of the two last cases an invasion of India by Germany, Russia or Japan is only a question of time, and England will be unable to resist except by one of three means.

- (1) universal conscription in England & the Colonies
- (2) the aid of Japan or some other foreign power
- (3) the aid of the Indian people.

The first is useless for the defence of India, in case III, & can only be applied in case II, if England is still mistress of the seas. The second is dangerous to England herself, since the ally who helps, may also covet. The third means the concession of self-government to India. In case I, there will only remain four considerable powers in Europe & Asia, Russia, France, England, Japan — with perhaps a Balkan Confederacy or Empire as a fifth. That means as the next stage a struggle between England & Russia in Asia. There again England is reduced to one of the three

alternatives or a combination of them.

Of course, the war may take different turns from the above, with slightly altered circumstances & results; the one thing that is impossible, is that it should leave the world as it was before. In any case, the question of India must rise at no very long date. If England adopts more or less grudgingly the third alternative, our opportunity arrives and we must be ready to take it — on this basis, continuance of British rule & cooperation until we are strong enough to stand by ourselves. If not, we must still decide how we are to prepare ourselves, so as not to pass from one foreign domination to a worse.

I want those of you who have the capacity, to consider the situation as I have described it, to think over it, enlarging our old views which are no longer sufficient, and accustom yourselves to act always with these new & larger conceptions in your minds. I shall write nothing myself about my views, just as yet, as that might prevent you from thinking yourselves.

Only, two things you will see obviously from it, first, the necessity of seizing on any opportunity that arises of organisation or military training (not self-sacrificing charity, that has already been done); secondly, the necessity of creating an organisation & finding the means, if no opportunity presents itself. [. . .]

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 216-21)



A LETTER WRITTEN AFTER OCTOBER 1914

. . . If you could make yourselves entirely pure instruments, things would go much better. But there is always something in the prana and intellect which kicks against the pricks and resists the purifier. Especially get rid of the *Aham Karta* element, which usually disguises itself under the idea “I am the chosen yantra”. Despise no one, try to see God in all and the Self in all. The Shakti in you will then act better on your materials and environment.

There is another point. You sent a message about an “Aurobindo Math” which seemed to show you had caught the contagion which rages in Bengal. You must understand that my mission is not to create maths, ascetics and Sannyasis; but to call back the souls of the strong to the Lila of Krishna & Kali. That is my teaching, as you can see from the Review, and my name must never be connected with monastic forms or the monastic ideal. Every ascetic movement since the time of Buddha has left India weaker and for a very obvious reason. Renunciation of life is one thing, to make

life itself, national, individual, world-life greater & more divine is another. You cannot enforce one ideal on the country without weakening the other. You cannot take away the best souls from life & yet leave life stronger & greater. Renunciation of ego, acceptance of God in life is the Yoga I teach, — no other renunciation.

[. . .]

P.S. By the way, try to realise one thing. The work we wish to do cannot produce its effects on the objective world until my Ashtasiddhi is strong enough to work upon that world organically and as a whole, & it has not yet reached that point. No amount of rajasic eagerness on my part or on yours or anybody else's will fill the place or can substitute itself as the divine instrument which will be definitely effective.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 221-23)



A LETTER OF 1914-1915

. . . It is regrettable that Bengal should be unable to find anything in the Arya, but not surprising. The intellect of Bengal has been so much fed on chemical tablets of thought and hot spiced foods that anything strong and substantial is indigestible to it. Moreover people in India are accustomed only to second-hand thoughts, — the old familiar ideas of the six philosophies, Patanjali etc. etc. Any new presentation of life and thought and Yoga upsets their expectations and is unintelligible to them. The thought of the Arya demands close thinking from the reader; it does not spare him the trouble of thinking and understanding and the minds of the people have long been accustomed to have the trouble of thought spared them. They know how to indulge their minds, they have forgotten how to exercise them.

It does not matter very much just now, so long as the people who practise the Yoga, read and profit. The Arya presents a new philosophy and a new method of Yoga and everything that is new takes time to get a hearing. Of course, in reality it is only the old brought back again, but so old that it has been forgotten. It is only those who practise and experience that can at first understand it. In a way, this is good, because it is meant to change the life of people and not merely satisfy the intellect. In France it has been very much appreciated by those who are seeking the truth, because these people are not shut up in old and received ideas, they are on the lookout for something which will change the inner and outer life. When the same state of mind

can be brought about here, the Arya will begin to be appreciated. At present, Bengal only understands and appreciates politics and asceticism. The central ideas of the Arya are Greek to it.

Soon after the Arya began, I got a letter from some graduates saying that what they wanted was “man-making”. I have done my share of man-making and it is a thing which now anybody can do; Nature herself is looking after it all over the world, though more slowly in India than elsewhere. My business is now not man-making, but divine man-making. My present teaching is that the world is preparing for a new progress, a new evolution. Whatever race, whatever country seizes on the lines of that new evolution and fulfils it, will be the leader of humanity. In the Arya I state the thought upon which this new evolution will be based as I see it, and the method of Yoga by which it can be accomplished. Of course, I cannot speak plainly yet my whole message, for obvious reasons, I have to put it in a severe, colourless fashion which cannot be pleasing to the emotional and excitement-seeking Bengali mind. But the message is there, for those who care to understand. It has really three parts (1) for each man as an individual to change himself into the future type of divine humanity, the men of the new Satyayuga which is striving to be born; (2) to evolve a race of such men to lead humanity and (3) to call all humanity to the path under the lead of these pioneers and this chosen race. India and especially Bengal have the best chance and the best right to create that race and become the leaders of the future — to do in the right way what Germany thought of doing in the wrong way. But first they must learn to think, to cast away old ideas, and turn their faces resolutely to the future. But they cannot do this, if they merely copy European politics or go on eternally reproducing Buddhistic asceticism. I am afraid the Ramakrishna Mission with all its good intentions is only going to give us Shankaracharya & Buddhistic humanitarianism. But that is not the goal to which the world is moving. Meanwhile remember that these are very difficult times and careful walking is necessary. It is just possible that the war may come to an end in a few months, for the old immobility is beginning to break down and the forces at work behind the veil are straining towards a solution. While the war continues, nothing great can be done, we are fettered on every side. Afterwards things will change and we must wait for the development.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 224-26)



JOHANNES HOHLENBERG'S RECOLLECTIONS

Johannes Hohlenberg (1881-1960) was a Danish artist.

From a letter to a devotee in 1948:

Concerning my visit to Aurobindo in Pondicherry in 1915 it is difficult to give details.

First it is 33 years ago, and my staying there was very short owing to the fact that I was arrested by the Englishmen and put on board of the first ship leaving for Europe. It was during the first war and, as I later knew, my frequent visits to Aurobindo's house had thrown suspicion on me for being a spy or a revolutionary, as at that epoch his brother was considered as a very dangerous rebel and even he himself was not looked upon with favour. Indeed I was warned by the British consul in Pondicherry, who told me that, though he knew that Aurobindo was perfectly innocent and absolutely honest, I was very likely to be arrested, if I left Pondicherry for English territory. And that is what happened. So my sojourn in India, that was intended to last much longer, was interrupted after little more than a month and all my plans overthrown. Later on my journey home I was again arrested and detained in London for 3 weeks, for the same reason. But that is another story.

Now I must tell you my reason for going to India.

In the years 1906-12 I lived in Paris, where I was very intimately befriended with Paul Richard, who in 1910 went to India as a candidate for the *chambre de députés*, for the French colonies. During this trip he made the acquaintance of Aurobindo, who at that time or shortly after started a monthly magazine: *ARYA*, that was published in a French and an English edition. It was agreed that I should come to India to help him in this task, and early in the summer of 1914 everything was ready for my departure for Pondicherry to join Mr. Richard, who had returned thereto after having failed to be elected as a *député*. Then came the war and postponed my departure for nearly a year. At last in the spring of 1915 I was able to start, but at the same time Mr. Richard had to leave India for doing military service in France. For this and other reasons the editorial project had to be given up so far as I was concerned. Still I went on and made the acquaintance of Aurobindo, introduced by Mr. Richard, and made his portrait. Shortly after I left Pondicherry and was arrested, as above said.

As to the kind of conversations I had with him it is impossible to me, after so long time, to give you any detailed record. They treated religious and moral topics, and my impression of him was that of a very wise and noble spirit. Of the mystical experiences you say he went through at that special epoch he gave no direct evidence, but of course it was felt through his acts and words. Later I wrote a book *YOGA*, which I dedicated to him and that for a great part is based on the entertainments [*perhaps from the French term 'entretiens' meaning 'conversations'*] I had with him.

As a model he was excellent and most obliging.

Now for the picture of which I send you a photo by the same mail. An unretouched photo, as you may know, never gives an exact impression of the original. The picture is darker than it appears in the photo, deeper and warmer in colour. The brush strokes and the many small lines that look like a network especially in the face, hair and beard are due to rugosities [*roughness or coarseness?*] in the colour surface and are not seen in the original. The size of the canvas is 80 x 60 cm. The picture is known by Madame Mirra Richard, née Alfassa, who saw it in France at my return journey and who, as I understand, is still in Pondicherry. She liked it very much and certainly still remembers it and can tell you about it.

This is what I can tell you concerning this matter, I hope it will be sufficient. . . .

Yours very sincerely
Johannes Hohlenberg



A LETTER OF 6 MAY 1915

All is always for [the] best, but it is sometimes from the external point of view an awkward best.

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. . . The whole earth is now under one law and answers to the same vibrations and I am sceptical of finding any place where the clash of the struggle will not pursue us. In any case, an effective retirement does not seem to be my destiny. I must remain in touch with the world until I have either mastered adverse circumstances or succumbed or carried on the struggle between the spiritual and physical so far as I am destined to carry it on. This is how I have always seen things and still see them. As for failure, difficulty and apparent impossibility I am too much habituated to them to be much impressed by their constant self-presentation except for passing moments.

*

One needs to have a calm heart, a settled will, entire self-abnegation and the eyes constantly fixed on the beyond to live undiscouraged in times like these which are truly a period of universal decomposition. For myself, I follow the Voice and look

neither to right nor to left of me. The result is not mine and hardly at all now even the labour.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, p. 285)



A LETTER OF 20 MAY 1915

Heaven we have possessed, but not the earth; but the fullness of the yoga is to make, in the formula of the Veda, "Heaven and Earth equal and one".

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, p. 286)



A LETTER OF 28 JULY 1915

Everything internal is ripe or ripening, but there is a sort of locked struggle in which neither side can make a very appreciable advance (somewhat like the trench warfare in Europe), the spiritual force insisting against the resistance of the physical world, that resistance disputing every inch and making more or less effective counter-attacks. . . . And if there were not the strength and Ananda within, it would be harassing and disgusting work; but the eye of knowledge looks beyond and sees that it is only a protracted episode.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, p. 286)



A LETTER OF 16 SEPTEMBER 1915

I have begun in the issue of the Arya which is just out a number of articles on the Ideal of Human Unity. I intend to proceed very cautiously and not go very deep at first, but as if I were leading the intelligence of the reader gradually towards the deeper meaning of unity, — especially to discourage the idea that mistakes uniformity and mechanical association for unity.

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Nothing seems able to disturb the immobility of things and all that is active outside our own selves is a sort of welter of dark and sombre confusion from which nothing formed or luminous can emerge. It is a singular condition of the world, the very definition of chaos with the superficial form of the old world resting apparently intact on the surface. But a chaos of long disintegration or of some early new birth? It is the thing that is being fought out from day to day, but as yet without any approach to a decision.

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These periods of stagnation always conceal work below the surface which produces some advance afterwards.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 286-87)



A LETTER OF 18 NOVEMBER 1915

These things really depend on ourselves much more than on outside factors. If we do not raise difficulties by our thoughts and mental constructions or do not confirm them if they rise, if we have the calm and peace within and there is not that in us which excites the enemy to throw himself on us, then outward possibilities, usually, will not concretise themselves.

*

Our business at present is to gather spiritual force, calm knowledge and joy regardless of the adverse powers and happenings around us so that when our work really begins we shall be able to impose ourselves on the material world in which our work lies. (This [I] am slowly doing: you, I think, more rapidly.)

*

I am always of the opinion that the internal must precede the external, otherwise whatever work we attempt beyond our internal powers and knowledge is likely to fail or be broken.

*

This is precisely my present struggle to get outside the circle of forces and possibilities into the light of the Truth, the *vijnana*.

*

Abdul Baha's prevision is possibly correct, but at present it seems to me to be put into too rigid a form. A centre of light, not necessarily translated into the terms of a physical grouping, but in which a few can stand, an increasing circle of luminosity into which more & more can enter, and outside the twilight world certain struggling with the light, this seems to be the inevitable course.

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We live still more in the reflection of the light than in the light itself, and until we get nearer to the centre we cannot know.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 287-88)



A LETTER OF 23 JUNE 1916

The difficulties you find in the spiritual progress are common to us all. In this Yoga the progress is always attended with these relapses into the ordinary mentality until the whole being is so remoulded that it can no longer be affected either by any downward tendency in our own nature or by the impressions from the discordant world outside or even by the mental state of those associated with us most closely in the Yoga. The ordinary Yoga is usually concentrated on a single aim and therefore less exposed to such recoils; ours is so complex and many-sided and embraces such large aims that we cannot expect any smooth progress until we near the completion of our effort, — especially as all the hostile forces in the spiritual world are in a constant state of opposition and besiege our gains; for the complete victory of a single one of us would mean a general downfall among them. In fact by our own unaided effort we could not hope to succeed. It is only in proportion as we come into a more and more universal communion with the Highest that we can hope to overcome with any finality. For myself I have had to come back so often from things that seemed to have been securely gained that it is only relatively that I can say of any part of my Yoga, “It is done”. Still I have always found that when I recover from one of these recoils, it is always with a new spiritual gain which might have been neglected or missed if I had remained securely in my former state of partial satisfaction. Especially, as I have long had the map of my advance sketched out before me, I am able to measure my progress at each step and the particular losses are compensated for by the clear consciousness of the general advance that has been made. The final goal is far but the progress made in the face of so constant and massive an opposition is the guarantee of its being gained in the end. But the time is in other hands than ours. Therefore I have put impatience and dissatisfaction far away from me.

An absolute equality of the mind and heart and a clear purity and calm strength in all the members of the being have long been the primary condition on which the Power working in me has insisted with an inexhaustible patience and an undeviating constancy of will which rejects all the efforts of other powers to hasten forward to the neglect of these first requisites. Wherever they are impaired it returns upon them and works over and again over the weak points like a workman patiently mending the defects of his work. These seem to me to be the foundation and condition of all the rest. As they become firmer and more complete the system is more able to hold consistently and vividly the settled perception of the One in all things and beings, in all qualities, forces, happenings, in all this world-consciousness and the play of its workings. That founds the Unity and upon it the deep satisfaction and the growing rapture of the Unity. It is this to which our nature is most recalcitrant. It persists in the division, in the dualities, in the sorrow and unsatisfied passion and labour, it finds it difficult to accustom itself to the divine largeness, joy and equipoise — especially the vital and material parts of our nature; it is they that pull down the mind which has

accepted and even when it has long lived in the joy and peace and oneness. That, I suppose, is why the religions and philosophies have had so strong a leaning to the condemnation of Life and Matter and aimed at an escape instead of a victory. But the victory has to be won; the rebellious elements have to be redeemed and transformed, not rejected or excised.

When the Unity has been well founded, the static half of our work is done, but the active half remains. It is then that in the One we must see the Master and His Power, — Krishna and Kali as I name them using the terms of our Indian religions; the Power occupying the whole of myself and my nature which becomes Kali and ceases to be anything else, the Master using, directing, enjoying the Power to his ends, not mine, with that which I call myself only as a centre of his universal existence and responding to its workings as a soul to the Soul, taking upon itself his image until there is nothing left but Krishna and Kali. This is the stage I have reached in spite of all setbacks and recoils, imperfectly indeed in the secureness and intensity of the state, but well enough in the general type. When that has been done, then we may hope to found securely the play in us of his divine Knowledge governing the action of his divine Power. The rest is the full opening up of the different planes of his world-play and the subjection of Matter and the body and the material world to the law of the higher heavens of the Truth. To these things towards which in my earlier ignorance I used to press forward impatiently before satisfying the first conditions — the effort, however, was necessary and made the necessary preparation of the material instruments — I can now only look forward as a subsequent eventuality in a yet distant vista of things.

To possess securely the Light and the Force of the supramental being, this is the main object to which the Power is now turning. But the remnant of the old habits of intellectual thought and mental will come so obstinate in their determination to remain that the progress is hampered, uncertain and always falls back from the little achievement already effected. They are no longer within me, they are blind, stupid, mechanical, incorrigible even when they perceive their incompetence, but they crowd round the mind and pour in their suggestions whenever it tries to remain open only to the supramental Light and the higher Command, so that the knowledge and the will reach the mind in a confused, distorted and often misleading form. It is, however, only a question of time: the siege will diminish in force and be finally dispelled.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 288-91)



A RARE MESSAGE FROM SRI AUROBINDO

B. Shiva Rao was representative at New Delhi of The Hindu and The Manchester Guardian. He was, later, a member of the Constituent Assembly, and subsequently member of the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha and delegate to the U. N. General Assembly. He recalls:

As August 1942 approached, there was a growing feeling of crisis in the air. I went down to Bombay for that fateful meeting of the AICC on August 9 which led to large-scale arrests all over the country. I got an interview from Mr. Nehru (published in *The Hindu* and *The Manchester Guardian*) a few hours before his arrest, that there was no question of India prematurely attempting to make a separate peace with Japan, if a political settlement was achieved. The statement had, however, singularly little effect on the Government's decision to lock up thousands of Congress members throughout India.

One incident I should record before proceeding further, though it goes back by a few months. In the final stages of the Cripps negotiations, an emissary arrived in New Delhi from Sri Aurobindo, with a message (which was conveyed to me and to a few others) that the sage of Pondicherry favoured an unconditional acceptance of the Cripps offer. I passed it on promptly to some of the Congress leaders. My last contact with Sri Aurobindo was in 1917, when I had the privilege of a brief interview with him. He had not at that time taken the vow of silence. It was a long-cherished desire of mine, since my college days when I was deeply influenced by his writings, to make his acquaintance. He received me graciously and said he was following with interest the course of the Home Rule Movement. He thought Mrs. Besant (under whom I was working at that time) was wholly right, both in claiming Home Rule for India and in supporting the cause of the Allies in the First World War. I felt elated that 25 years later he should have remembered me and asked one of his disciples to give me the message about the Cripps offer.

(From *The Hindu*, Monday, November 14, 1955)



IN THE PRESENCE OF AN UNUSUALLY MIGHTY PERSONALITY

T. V. Kapali Sastry (1886-1953) felt the Breath of the Spirit from a very early age. The seeker in him was thrilled when he received from a friend the first issue of the Arya. It was a deeply significant occasion. He had recognised the Master.

As I went up the stairs and reached the threshold, there stretched in front of me a long hall with a simple table and two chairs at the centre. At the farther end was a room on the threshold of which stood Sri Aurobindo. Like a moving statue — such was his impersonal bearing — he advanced towards the table as I proceeded from my end and we both met at the centre. Like Rama, the Aryan model of courtesy and nobility held up by Valmiki, Sri Aurobindo spoke first, *pūrva-bhāsi*. I had carried with me a lemon fruit as a humble expression of my esteem for him and after he sat down, I placed it on the table in front of him and said: *sudinam asid adya* (a happy day today).

Sri Aurobindo leaned over to the youngster who was still there and seemed to ask him if I knew English. He was assured I knew and with what smattering of the language I had, we commenced the conversation. It would be an omission if I fail to tell here what happened the moment I stood face to face with Sri Aurobindo at the table.

The age is past when matters of this kind had to be kept to oneself and concealed from others for fear of scoffings from rationalists and sceptics. Man has come to realise that there are more things on earth and in heaven than are written in books and discovered in laboratories. Well, as soon I saw him, even from a distance, there was set in motion, all of a sudden, a rapid vibratory movement in my body from head to foot. There was a continuous thrill and throb. I seemed to stand on the top of a dynamo working at top speed and it was as powerful as it was new. It lasted for nearly four to five minutes. It did not really stop at all. In fact it continued ever since for long and every time I went to see him later, or for his Darshan after his retirement, the phenomenon tended to repeat itself.

A spiritual personality continually pours out spiritual emanations from within and it would seem that when any one with some secret affinity or even a point of contact somewhere in the being comes within the ambience of these vibrations, there is an attempt by something subtle in us to imbibe as much of these sustaining and strength-giving radiations as possible. But the physique not being so supple cannot support this occult commerce for long; it lacks the necessary nerve-force to keep up the flow and the physical palpitating movement is the result. Of course, I find this explanation now. All that I knew at that time and could not help knowing was that I

was in the presence of an unusually mighty personality. Was it the sun-flower turned to the sun, or was it the filings in a tremulous dance before a block of magnet or was he the mystic spider, ever watchful, taking his prey alive to preserve it within his web biding his hour?

I had three important questions to ask, two of them are not of moment here. The question of the country's future was naturally uppermost in my mind and I was eager to know what Sri Aurobindo thought of it. I wanted to have a word of hope, if that was possible, from this statesman and prophet, from this rare gift of God to the nation, in regard to the prospects before the country and asked:

“What are the immediate possibilities of India?”

“Why possibility? It is a *certainty*,” he returned with emphasis.

The Hindu-Muslim problem was lurking in the minds of thinking politicians who were few; in spite of Tilak and the Lucknow Pact the fear was there. “We have to bargain and purchase patriotism from them,” I put in. He agreed it was a serious hurdle but hoped that reform movements would come on and influence the progressive sections of the communities. “A *larger* Hinduism could find a solution and it is a necessity,” he added thoughtfully.

It was seven o'clock now, [. . .] and I rose to take leave. To a question of mine, while parting, he said: “You can come here tomorrow, but by this time.”

Did I part the same person who came at six o'clock? Apparently I did. But not for long. For, something had happened to me of which I was not fully mindful nor did I imagine the full significance of what took place in my first meeting with Sri Aurobindo.

Something had been set going which carried me on its wings — this is more than a figure of speech — shuttling me from and back to him with an irresistible intensity till at last I came back to him six years later (1923), in a different role this time, as a seeker seeking the feet of the Teacher, and exclaimed marvelling at the change in his appearance:

“What other proof is required, Sire! Then your complexion was dark-brown, now it is fair; today the hue is a golden hue. Here is the concrete proof of the Yoga that is yours.”

(*The Way of Light*, edited by M. P. Pandit, published by
Dipti Publications, 1963, pp. 37-40)



A LETTER OF 1918-1919

If you want discipline, the first thing of that kind I would impose on you or ask you to impose on yourselves is self-discipline, *âtma-sanyama*, and the first element in that is obedience to the law of the Yoga I have given to you. If you bring in things which do not belong to it at all and are quite foreign to it, such as “hunger-strikes” and vehement emotional revolt against the divine Will, it is idle to expect any rapid progress. That means that you insist on going on your own bypath and yet demand of me that I shall bring you to my goal. All difficulties can be conquered, but only on condition of fidelity to the Way that you have taken. There is no obligation on anyone to take it, — it is a difficult and trying one, a way for heroes, not for weaklings, — but once taken, it must be followed, or you will not arrive.

Remember what is the whole basis of the Yoga. It is not founded upon the vehement emotionalism of the Bhakti-marga to which the temperament of Bengal is most prone, though it has a different kind of Bhakti, but on *samata* and *atma-samarpana*. Obedience to the divine Will, not assertion of self-will, is the very first *mantra*. But what can be a more violent assertion of self-will than to demand the result you desire, whether external or internal, at once, এই মুহূর্তে এই ক্ষণে and not in God’s muhurta, God’s moment? You say that there is complete *utsarga*, but it cannot be complete, if there is any kind of revolt or vehement impatience. Revolt and impatience mean always that there is a part of the being or something in the being which does not submit, has not given itself to God, but insists on God going out of his way to obey it. That may be very well in the Bhakti-marga, but it will not do on this Way. The revolt and impatience may come and will come in the heart or the prana when these are still subject to imperfection and impurity; but it is then for the will and the faith in your buddhi to reject them, not to act upon them. If the will consents, approves and supports them, it means that you are siding with the inner enemy. If you want rapid progress, the first condition is that you should not do this; for every time you do it, the enemy is strengthened and the *shuddhi* postponed. This is a difficult lesson to learn, but you must learn it. I do not find fault with you for taking long over it, I myself took full twelve years to learn it thoroughly, and even after I knew the principle well enough, it took me quite four years and more to master my lower nature in this respect. But you have the advantage of my experience and my help; you will be able to do it more rapidly, if you consciously and fully assist me, by not associating yourself with the enemy Desire; *jahi kâmam durâsadam*, remember that utterance of the Gita, it is a keyword of our Yoga.

[. . .]

Shuddhi is the most difficult part of the whole Yoga, it is the condition of all the rest, and if that is once conquered, the real conquest is accomplished. The rest becomes a comparatively easy building on an assured basis, — it may take longer or shorter, but it can be done tranquilly and steadily. To prevent the shuddhi the lower nature in

you and around you will exhaust all its efforts, and even when it cannot prevent, it will try to retard. And its strongest weapon then is, when you think you have got it, suddenly to break in on you and convince you that you have not got it, that it is far away, and so arouse disappointment, grief, loss of faith, discouragement, depression and revolt, the whole army of troubles that wait upon impure Desire. When you have once found calm, peace of mind, firm faith, equality and been able to live in it for some time, then and only then you may be sure that *suddhi* is founded; but you must not think it will not be disturbed. It will be, so long as your heart and *prana* are still capable of responding to the old movements, have still any memory and habit of vibrating to the old chords. The one thing necessary when the renewed trouble comes, is to stand back in your mind and will from it, refuse it the sanction of your higher being, even when it is raging in the lower nature. As that habit of refusal fixes itself, — at first you may not be able to do it, the *buddhi* may be lost in the storm, — you will find that the *asuddhi*, even though it still returns, becomes less violent, more and more external, until it ceases to be anything more than a faint and short-lived touch from outside and finally comes no more. That is the course it has followed with me, not only with regard to this kind of disturbance, but with regard to all imperfections. You, since you have chosen to share my Yoga for mankind, must follow the same way, undergo the same disturbances.

This is a thing which it is necessary for you to understand clearly. I myself have had for these fourteen years, and it is not yet finished, to bear all the possible typical difficulties, troubles, downfalls and backslidings that can rise in this great effort to change the whole normal human being. How else could I have been able to help or guide others on the same way? Those who join me at the present stage, must share in my burden, especially those who are themselves chosen in any degree to lead, help and guide. It may be that when I have the complete *siddhi*, — which I have not yet, I am only on the way to it, — then, if it be God's will to extend very largely and rapidly my work in this body, those who come after may have the way made very easy for them. But we are the pioneers hewing our way through the jungle of the lower *prakriti*. It will not do for us to be cowards and shirkers and refuse the burden, to clamour for everything to be made quick and easy for us. Above all things I demand from you endurance, firmness, heroism, — the true spiritual heroism. I want strong men, I do not want emotional children. Manhood first, দেবত্ব can only be built upon that. If I do not get it in those who accept my Yoga, then I shall have to understand that it is not God's will that I should succeed. If that be so, I shall accept his will calmly. But meanwhile I go on bearing whatever burden he lays on me, meeting whatever difficulties he puts in the way of my *siddhi*. Personally, I am now sure of success in everything except in the *kaya-siddhi*, which is still doubtful, and in my work. The work can only succeed if I find noble and worthy helpers, fitted for it by the same struggles and the same endurance. I expect them in you.

Again you must not expect the *shuddhi* or any part of the *siddhi* to be simultaneous

and complete at once in all whom you associate with you. One may attain, others progress, others linger. You must not expect a sudden collective miracle. I have not come here to accomplish miracles, but to show, lead the way, help, on the road to a great inner change of our human nature, — the outer change in the world is only possible if and when that inner transmutation is effected and extends itself. You must not expect to establish a perfect *sangha* all at once and by a single leap. If you make such demands on me, I can only say that I cannot do what is not God's will. Go forward calmly and firmly, not attached to success, not disturbed by unsuccess; my help will then not fail you. [. . .]

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 228-31)



AN ARTIST'S MEETING WITH SRI AUROBINDO IN 1919

Mukul Chandra Dey (1895-1989) was a renowned artist. A student of Santiniketan and later a member of the staff, he is considered as a pioneer of drypoint etching in India. He was also the first to travel abroad for the purpose of studying printmaking as an art. He was the first Indian Principal of the Government Art School, Calcutta. He was a Fulbright Scholar in the U.S.A. in 1953-54 and a visiting professor to several universities abroad.

It was 1919. I was in Madras at that time. After my book *Twelve Portraits of Bengal* had been published in 1917 I toured Bombay and South India and arrived at Madras. My aim was to see my country well before going to England and to earn for my passage. At that time there weren't any famous men of South India whose portrait I did not draw in pencil and whose special company and affection I did not enjoy.

The head of the publicity department of Theosophical Society at Adyar was Mr. B. P. Wadyar. Mrs. Annie Besant and he were very happy and enthusiastic on seeing all my things and said, "Mukul Dey, we too will bring out a similar book from Madras, if only you can do a portrait of Aurobindo and bring it back from Pondicherry. For, without a portrait of Aurobindo, *South Indian Portraits* will be incomplete." I agreed immediately — "Surely I'll paint and bring it." And in fact I succeeded. I received something greater.

I told them — "Surely I'll bring," but on returning home I started worrying, "How shall I go? Won't the police get suspicious and cancel my passport for England?" About my going to England I had taken a firm decision. Anyway, after much hesitation

I dressed in a peculiar mixed-up dress so that no one recognised me for a Bengali. Socks, shoes, trousers, tie, a long coat, and over that my special cap which I had brought from Japan — which resembles a bit the present-day Gandhi-cap — it can be folded and kept in the pocket and when necessary can be used to cover the head. On seeing my gait, my dress, etc. some took me for a Goanese, some a Madrasi, or even an Anglo-Indian, but nobody took me for a Bengali. Whatever few words I spoke were all in English with a Madrasi intonation. Thus safely I passed in the train and reached Pondicherry station at about 10-11 p.m. On reaching the station I got worried, “I have arrived but where shall I put up? If someone makes out from my behaviour that I am a foreigner, a stranger, a new person, a Bengali, — then I would be in the soup. Again, I may be arrested by the police.” I did not have any letter of introduction, of commendation or even of permission. There was no time to think even. Immediately I hit upon a plan, looked smart — as if I have visited the place many times — and in this way proceeded towards the horse-drawn cart. I asked the coachman — ”Take me to the Grand Hotel, European French Hotel” — in the hope that there must be at least one “grand hotel”.

After some time, crossing a sandy road covered with thorny plants, the coachman stopped in front of a European hotel. After paying the fare, I approached the manager of the hotel for the cheapest room. I entered the cheapest room with a rent of Rs. 6/- or 7/- per day. It was a room on the ground floor with a low ceiling — the terrace almost knocking the head! It was as dark as it was damp, as if water was seeping from the floor, — the walls were in equally bad shape. Only one opening in the room — the sort of window through which light and breeze could enter — from that some sea breeze came and one could see the sea too. The room was a bit like a store room of our museums here. But at that time, on entering that room, I heaved a sigh of relief. At least a shelter had been found.

But so long as the real object of coming, that is, the painting of Aurobindo was not accomplished, I could not be free from worries. Therefore I did not sleep well that night. The next morning I woke up early, got ready hurriedly and after somehow eating a little went out into the streets. I moved about a little and got familiar with the streets. Most of the time I walked along the seaside — as if I had come to enjoy the breeze. I kept my ears open to hear if there was any talk of Sri Aurobindo, and my eyes open in case he came for a promenade on the seashore. But I neither saw nor heard any of this or what I wanted. I was afraid to ask anyone — in case thereby everything got spoilt. In this way I moved about along the thoroughfares — got acquainted with the streets. Three days passed by.

On the fourth day, 20th April, with a pencil and a pad under my arms, I started moving about near the seaside and got acquainted with a local gentleman. I asked him — “Aurobindo is quite a good man, isn’t he? Of cool temperament. What do you say?” He replied, “Yes, surely, he is a very good person, at least to me he seems to be so. Gentle — but he never comes out of the house, he remains day and night in that

old house.” I asked, “The house is somewhere on that side, isn’t it?” He said, “No, not this side, it is that side, the house is on that street.” Without asking him anything more or giving him a chance to ask me anything, I took the road opposite to his. Then, remembering God with full concentration I took the road to Sri Aurobindo’s house. There was fear, anxiety, trepidation. Who knows if I’ll be able to see him — if there won’t be any obstruction on the way?

It was a noon of April, the sun was burning bright, the streets almost deserted. With palpitating heart, enquiring from a person or two, I managed to find the right house. It was an old two-storey dilapidated house. The walls were perhaps once yellow — now there were patches, green with moss — and the lime plaster had fallen off at places, exposing the red bricks. The doors and windows were wide open. Slowly, with a trembling heart and fearful eyes, I entered it. There was a banana tree in the courtyard, its leaves all torn. Grass and weeds made the courtyard look like a knee-deep jungle. At one place there was a heap of charcoal, at another fire wood — as if the things were left pell-mell. Two or three cats were sleeping near the banana tree. In fact on all sides of the ash heap there were cats, as though it was a cats’ hostel.

One Bengali gentleman, thin in appearance — perhaps he was cooking or doing something similar — came out and asked me, “What do you want?”

I enquired, “Does Sri Aurobindo stay here?”

He replied, “Yes, he stays here.”

“I would like to meet him once. Will it be possible to see him?” I asked.

“Who are you? You seem to be a Bengali!” he observed.

“Yes, I am a Bengali, my name is Mukul Dey.”

He led me upstairs.

He made me sit in the verandah on a wooden chair and said, “Please take your seat, I am informing him.” The chair also was ancient; like the house it was also in an old and shaky condition. There was no trace of colour or polish, as if everything had been washed away, eaten away. I sat with a mixed feeling of happiness and anxiety — I looked on all sides. There were some three or four pictures hanging on the wall, pictures published in monthly magazines, cut out and framed. At this I saw a glimmer of hope and cheer. So, he loves pictures! Suddenly I noticed, among these there was one painted by me; it had come out in a monthly — ‘Sri Radha with a pitcher on her waist going to fetch water’ — and underneath the picture there was inscribed my name. I was very happy to see it. What a lovely coincidence! I felt some assurance and courage. This would do the work of an introduction letter: I had come, completely unknown, with no letter of introduction from any one.

In the meantime he was slowly coming out of the room. He was wearing a small-sized red-bordered rather soiled dhoti which hung up to the knees; there were no pleats; one end was placed around the neck, bare feet, bare body, long hair, bearded, a thin, austere body. Immediately on seeing him I understood that he was Sri Aurobindo — exactly like the rishis of yore or as if I was seeing a living Christ.

He asked, “What do you want?”

“My name is Mukul Dey, I am a Bengali, I have come to draw your picture. I know you are fond of paintings.” I said this and showed him the pictures on the wall and added — “There, one of them is painted by me.”

He smiled a little and said, “Yes, I like it quite. I know.” Then he said as if pleased, “Well, what have I to do?” I replied, “You won’t have to do anything, it will be sufficient if you would just sit quietly.”

“How long do I have to sit?”

“About half an hour, one hour —”

“Can you draw if I sit now?”

As if the heavens had fallen into my hands, I was so overwhelmed with joy! “Yes, I can,” I said and took out a sheet of paper and a pencil and sat down. He too sat on an old wooden chair.

I have drawn portraits of so many people in my life but I haven’t seen any one giving such a wonderful sitting. I drew for one full hour, during which he did not move even a bit, nor did I see him bat an eyelid even once. He was going on gazing one way, at one side, with fixed eyes. Overwhelmed with surprise and joy I touched his feet and showed him what I had sketched. He was obviously happy. He looked at it from different angles. On my request he autographed it in English and Bengali and wrote the date. Telling him that I would come again the next day, I returned to the hotel. What happiness, what surprise and fullness in my mind that day! It cannot be expressed in words.

Next day, 21st of April. I got up early in the morning, had my bath, ate something, and taking my paper, pencil, etc. went out to see Sri Aurobindo. No more struggles for finding the way. Taking the known path I went easily to his house and straight upstairs. The doors were wide open — as if everything was easy and known — I sat down on that same chair in the verandah. A short while later he came out of his room and sat on his chair — in the same way, like a stone statue, immobile, quiet, with fixed regard. In one hour I completed my second portrait. He saw and autographed it and put the date on it. I took leave of him by telling that I would come once again in the evening. I was filled with happiness. I would make three portraits from three sides and take them with me; surely people will like at least one of these.

I started again in the afternoon, with my portfolio under the arms. Myriad thoughts passed through my mind. He is that Aurobindo. How wonderful, how strange he is! England-returned I.C.S. — Revolutionary leader — How many stories have I heard about him! Are they all true? Who knows! Again straightaway I entered the house, sat down on the same chair in the upstairs verandah. He too came out just a little later. In the same way, bare bodied, bare feet, a corner of the dhoti around his neck, with a smile on the face. I did my pranams and started immediately. I drew for over an hour, but how strange, I did not see him bat the eyelids even once! After the drawing was over I took it to him. On the third also he signed his name. As soon as he lifted his

head and looked at me smilingly, I said, “Can I ask you a few questions? I have heard many stories about you, I am very eager to know. You won’t mind, I hope?”

Smilingly he said, “No. Tell me what you want to ask, put your question.”

“When you were in England, and studied there, how did you like the British at that time? What was your attitude towards them?” I asked.

“My outlook at that time was friendly and cordial. I mixed with a good number of them. I had many friends in London.”

“But I have heard that you were the leader of the revolutionary party of Bengal. Extremely anti-British. What is your present stand towards the British?”

“Yes, what you have heard is correct, I was in the revolutionary party. While at England I used to think a lot about my own country. Then on return to the country, I became hostile to the British rule. But now I have no animosity against the British or for that matter against anyone else — no spite or anger, now I am in peace.”

“How did spite and anger disappear and how did this inner change and peace come?”

“When I was working with the revolutionaries in Bengal, at that time I got acquainted with a great yogi. It was from him that I learnt pranayama yoga and practised it. After that I came here and my anger and spite against all have disappeared, now I am in peace here.”

“If you do not have any anger or spite against anybody why don’t you come to Bengal? I have heard that your wife is living. I have seen her photo, she seems very beautiful, why are you here all alone, why don’t you return home? Won’t you return to your native place? When will you return to your homeland?” [*Note: Mrinalini Devi had passed away a few months before. Mr. Dey obviously did not know about it.*]

He remained silent for a while, then replied slowly, “Yes, I’ll return. When the country becomes free from the British rule.”

After that there were no talks. On being able to hear such luminous words of his and having been able to draw three pictures, when I begged of him my leave after giving my heartfelt thanks and grateful pranams, he said, “I liked very much your work and your conversation. I bless you, I wish you well.”

Placing the sacred dust of his feet and his blessings on my head, I felt overwhelmed with a sense of fulfilment. With the joy and pride as if I had conquered an empire, the same day I left Pondicherry for Madras.

When I had gone there and had the meeting, I encountered no noise, no crowd, no rules and regulations, devout priests, or guards, there was nothing of the kind, — there was then no need for a letter of introduction or a pass. Everything was easy and simple. My questions were very simple, the answers too, equally simple and true.

That day I did not have to prostrate myself before any priestly agent in order to have Darshan of the deity. I saw a Yogi living in Truth and Beauty. I saw an image of

a great Rishi of our ancient Bharat. His smile and the benign look has never dimmed in my memory.

(Courtesy *Heritage*. Reproduced from the issue of August 1988.)



A LETTER OF 5 JANUARY 1920

Your offer is a tempting one, but I regret that I cannot answer it in the affirmative. It is due to you that I should state explicitly my reasons. In the first place I am not prepared at present to return to British India. This is quite apart from any political obstacle. I understand that up to last September the Government of Bengal (and probably the Government of Madras also) were opposed to my return to British India and that practically this opposition meant that if I went back I should be interned or imprisoned under one or other of the beneficent Acts which are apparently still to subsist as helps in ushering in the new era of trust and cooperation. I do not suppose other Governments would be any more delighted by my appearance in their respective provinces. Perhaps the King's Proclamation may make a difference, but that is not certain since, as I read it, it does not mean an amnesty, but an act of gracious concession and benevolence limited by the discretion of the Viceroy. Now I have too much work on my hands to waste my time in the leisured ease of an involuntary Government guest. But even if I were assured of an entirely free action and movement, I should yet not go just now. I came to Pondicherry in order to have freedom and tranquillity for a fixed object having nothing to do with present politics — in which I have taken no direct part since my coming here, though what I could do for the country in my own way I have constantly done, — and until it is accomplished, it is not possible for me to resume any kind of public activity. But if I were in British India, I should be obliged to plunge at once into action of different kinds. Pondicherry is my place of retreat, my cave of tapasya, — not of the ascetic kind, but of a brand of my own invention. I must finish that, I must be internally armed and equipped for my work before I leave it.

Next in the matter of the work itself. I do not at all look down on politics or political action or consider I have got above them. I have always laid a dominant stress and I now lay an entire stress on the spiritual life, but my idea of spirituality has nothing to do with ascetic withdrawal or contempt or disgust of secular things. There is to me nothing secular, all human activity is for me a thing to be included in a complete spiritual life, and the importance of politics at the present time is very great. But my line and intention of political activity would differ considerably from anything now current in the field. I entered into political action and continued it from 1903 to

1910 with one aim and one alone, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it in place of the futile ambling Congress methods till then in vogue. That is now done and the Amritsar Congress is the seal upon it. The will is not as practical and compact nor by any means as organised and sustained in action as it should be, but there is the will and plenty of strong and able leaders to guide it. I consider that in spite of the inadequacy of the Reforms, the will to self-determination, if the country keeps its present temper, as I have no doubt it will, is bound to prevail before long. What preoccupies me now is the question what it is going to do with its self-determination, how will it use its freedom, on what lines is it going to determine its future?

You may ask why not come out and help, myself, so far as I can, in giving a lead? But my mind has a habit of running inconveniently ahead of the times, — some might say, out of time altogether into the world of the ideal. Your party, you say, is going to be a social democratic party. Now I believe in something which might be called social democracy, but not in any of the forms now current, and I am not altogether in love with the European kind, however great an improvement it may be on the past. I hold that India having a spirit of her own and a governing temperament proper to her own civilisation, should in politics as in everything else strike out her own original path and not stumble in the wake of Europe. But this is precisely what she will be obliged to do, if she has to start on the road in her present chaotic and unprepared condition of mind. No doubt people talk of India developing on her own lines, but nobody seems to have very clear or sufficient ideas as to what those lines are to be. In this matter I have formed ideals and certain definite ideas of my own, in which at present very few are likely to follow me, since they are governed by an uncompromising spiritual idealism of an unconventional kind and would be unintelligible to many and an offence and stumbling block to a great number. But I have not as yet any clear and full idea of the practical lines; I have no formed programme. In a word, I am feeling my way in my mind and am not ready for either propaganda or action. Even if I were, it would mean for some time ploughing my lonely furrow or at least freedom to take my own way. As the editor of your paper, I should be bound to voice the opinion of others and reserve my own, and while I have full sympathy with the general ideas of the advanced parties so far as concerns the action of the present moment and, if I were in the field, would do all I could to help them, I am almost incapable by nature of limiting myself in that way, at least to the extent that would be requisite.

Excuse the length of this screed. I thought it necessary to explain fully so as to avoid giving you the impression that I declined your request from any affectation or reality of spiritual aloofness or wish to shirk the call of the country or want of sympathy with the work you and others are so admirably doing. I repeat my regret that I am compelled to disappoint you.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 254-57)

A LETTER OF MAY 1920

. . . new conditions have come in which create a new and larger problem. First, many imprisoned forces have been set loose and, secondly, the chaos of incertitude, confused agitation and unseeing unrest which has followed upon the war and is felt all over the world, is now at work in Bengal. The nature of this unrest is a haste to get something done without knowing what has to be done, a sense of and vague response to large forces without any vision of or hold on the real possibilities of the future of humanity and the nation. The old things are broken up in their assured mould and are yet persisting and trying to form themselves anew, the new exist for the most part only in vague idea without a body or clear action and without any power as yet to form what is lacking to them. The old politics in India persist in a chaos of parties and programmes centred round the Congress quarrel and the Reforms, and in Bengal we have a rush of the commercial and industrial spirit which follows the Western principle and, if it succeeds on those lines, is likely to create a very disastrous reproduction or imitation of the European situation with its corrupt capitalism and the labour struggle and the war of classes. And all that is the very reverse of our own ideal. The one advantage for us is that it is a chaos and not a new order, and it is essential that we should throw our spirit and idea upon this fermentation, and draw what is best among its personalities and forces to the side and service of our ideal so as to get a hold and a greater mass of effectuation for it in the near future.

This, as I conceive it, has to be done on two lines. First, what has already been created by us and given a right spirit, basis and form, must be kept intact in spirit, intact in basis and intact in form and must strengthen and enlarge itself in its own strength and by its inherent power of self-development and the divine force within it. This is the line of work on which you have to proceed. We have to confront the confusion around us with a thing that is sure of itself and illumined by self-knowledge and a work that by its clear form and firm growth will present more and more the aspect of an assured solution of the problems of the present and the future. The mind of the outside world may be too shallow, restless and impatient to understand a great, profound and difficult truth like ours on the side of the idea, but a visible accomplishment, a body of things done has always the power to compel and to attract the world to follow it. The only danger then is that when this body of things becomes prominent and attractive, numbers may rush into it and try to follow the externals without realising and reproducing in themselves the truth and the power of the real thing that made it possible. It was that against which I warned you when there came the first possibility of a considerable expansion. It is your business to enlarge your field of work and the work itself but not at the cost of any lowering or adulteration of its spirit. The first condition you have to assure is that all who have the work in hand or share in its direction must be of the spirit and work from the self outward; they

must be men of the Yoga; but, secondly, all who enter in must have this imposed on them as the thing to be developed, must learn to develop this self-realisation first and foremost and the work only as its expression. The safety of the work lies in a strict adherence to this principle. The majority of the educated people of Bengal care only to get something done — and are not troubled by the fact that really nothing sure and lasting does get done or else only something that is likely to do as much harm as good; they care nothing about the spiritual basis of life which is India's real mission and the only possible source of her greatness, or give to it only a slight, secondary or incidental value, a something that has to be stuck on as a sentiment or a bit of colouring matter. Our whole principle is different and you have to insist on our principle in all that you say and do. Moreover, you have got a clear form for your work in association and that form as well as the spirit you must maintain; any loosening of it or compromise would mean confusion and an impairing of the force that is working in your sangha.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 236-37)



A LETTER OF 30 AUGUST 1920

. . . I am no longer first and foremost a politician, but have definitely commenced another kind of work with a spiritual basis, a work of spiritual, social, cultural and economic reconstruction of an almost revolutionary kind, and am even making or at least supervising a sort of practical or laboratory experiment in that sense which needs all the attention and energy that I can have to spare. It is impossible for me to combine political work of the current kind and this at the beginning. I should practically have to leave it aside, and this I cannot do, as I have taken it up as my mission for the rest of my life. This is the true reason of my inability to respond to your call.

I may say that in any case I think you would be making a wrong choice in asking me to take Tilak's place at your head. No one now alive in India, or at least no one yet known, is capable of taking that place, but myself least of all. I am an idealist to the marrow and could only be useful when there is something drastic to be done, a radical or revolutionary line to be taken, (I do not mean revolutionary by violence) a movement with an ideal aim and direct method to be inspired and organised.

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, p. 258)



INTERVIEW WITH A DISCIPLE

NOVEMBER or DECEMBER 1920

Disciple: What would be the nature of the spiritual commune?

Sri Aurobindo: It would be composed of those who intend to do Sadhana.

Disciple: Would it be established on economics as the central basis?

Sri Aurobindo: No, it would not be based merely on economics.

Disciple: Who would be admitted into the commune and what would be the method of selection?

Sri Aurobindo: Those who have taken to Sadhana; they are already united though unconsciously.

Disciple: Would it be necessary for members to have some intellectual work in the commune?

Sri Aurobindo: There must be three to four hours intellectual work every day. The members must be able to follow what the Yoga is and its processes.

Disciple: What would be the place of personal demand in such a commune?

Sri Aurobindo: Personal demand must not remain; everything would be intended for all. But before one joins it one must make sure of his spiritual aspiration.

Disciple: Will the collective organisation be economically self-sufficient?

Sri Aurobindo: No. It will have to produce more things because all its needs cannot be supplied by itself. It will have, therefore, to keep connection with the capitalist world. Agriculture is the mainstay. The community must try to be self-reliant with regard to food.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., p. 23)



SARALA DEVI'S VISIT

NOVEMBER or DECEMBER 1920

Sarala Devi Chowdhurani was Rabindranath Tagore's niece. She started the akhada movement in Calcutta in 1897 and when Sri Aurobindo sent Jatin Bannerji to Calcutta to set up secret societies to train young men for revolutionary work, it was to Sarala Devi that the letter of introduction was addressed. She was one of the important public figures in Calcutta

and she came to Pondicherry to meet Sri Aurobindo and to request him to return to the political field. It was evident she wanted to ascertain his future programme and his views on current politics. She met him for two days.

As she came up to meet him at the time fixed, 4.30 p.m., Sri Aurobindo got up from his chair to greet her. Both greeted each other with folded hands. After formal exchanges Sarala Devi began:

Sarala Devi: Is it true that you are against the non-cooperation movement?

Sri Aurobindo: I am not against it; the train has arrived, it must be allowed to run its own course. The only thing I feel is that there is great need of solidifying the national will for freedom into stern action.

Sarala Devi: Non-cooperation has declared war against imperialism.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, it has, but I am afraid it is done without proper ammunition, and mobilisation and organisation of the available forces.

Sarala Devi: Why don't you come out and try to run your own train?

Sri Aurobindo: I must first prepare the rails and lay them down, then only can I get the train to arrive.

Sarala Devi: But you must do something, should you not?

Sri Aurobindo: As for myself, I have a personal programme. But if I was in politics, even then I would have taken another stand. I would first be sure of my ground before I fought the Government.

Sarala Devi: Don't you think that sufficient work has been done in the country to start the fight?

Sri Aurobindo: Until now only waves of emotion and a certain all-round awakening have come. But the force which could stand the strain when the Government would put forth its force in full vigour is still not there.

What is needed is more organisation of the national will. It is no use emotional waves rising and spreading, then going down. Our leaders need not go on lecturing. What we should do is to organise local committees of action throughout the country to carry out any mandate of the central organisation. These local leaders must stay among the people.

Sarala Devi: But I find many people ridicule non-cooperation. Rabi Babu [Rabindranath Tagore] is choked by it. What is your frank personal opinion?

Sri Aurobindo: We have qualified sympathy with the movement; sympathy is there because we have the same objective; it is qualified because we feel that the basis is not sound. The Punjab martial law and atrocities, the Khilafat are there, and non-cooperation is based on those wrongs. Some students from Madras came here the other day and told me they wanted to non-cooperate because the Government was unjust. Asked whether they would put up with a just British Government they could not reply.

India must want freedom because of herself, because of her own Spirit. I would very much like India to find her own Swaraj and then, like Ireland, to work out her salvation even with violence — preferably without violence. Our basis must be broader than that of mere opposition to the British Government. All the time our eyes are turned to the British and their actions. We must look to ourselves irrespective of them and having found our own nationhood make it free.

(*Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 24-25)



JAMES COUSINS' VISIT

James Cousins (1873-1956) was an Irish writer, poet, teacher, critic. About his book New Ways in English Literature Sri Aurobindo said that it was "literary criticism which is of the first order, at once discerning and suggestive, criticism which forces us both to see and think."

He met the Mother in Japan.

A two-day visit (August 22-23, 1921) to the Yogi-philosopher, Aurobindo Ghosh, gave me an intimate touch with the long tradition of India. Out of political agitation in Bengal, Sri Aurobindo escaped to the French colony of Pondicherry on the coast of south-east India, and settled for a life of exile, devoted to philosophical, literary, and yogic study and practice. His home soon attracted disciples and visitors, and became recognised as an ashrama in the tradition of the rishis of old. My visit arose mainly out of literary interests. I had read with appreciation a small book of Sri Aurobindo's English verse, and had written an article on it. He had begun a review of my "New Ways in English Literature" with the brief, but sufficing sentence: "It is not often that literary criticism of the first order is produced in India. 'New Ways in English Literature' is eminently of this class;" and "The Renaissance in India", which included my preliminary impressions of the revival of Indian painting in Bengal, was made the text of a series of chapters on the same theme by the sage covering a year of the magazine of the Ashrama, "Arya", and published as a book under the same title as mine.

My first visit to Sri Aurobindo, 9 to 10 a.m. was difficult. He left all the talking to me. But my second interview next morning was the other way round: he had presumably taken my measure from my previous day's talk (a risky thing for even a sage to do), and talked for the allotted hour. What he said is as completely forgotten

as what I said the previous day: but I retain a flavour of gentleness and wisdom, breadth of thought, and extent of experience that marked him out as one among millions.

(*We Two Together* by James H. Cousins and Margaret E. Cousins,
published by Ganesh & Co., Madras, 1950, p. 394)



A LETTER OF 18 NOVEMBER 1922

. . . I have been so much retired and absorbed in my Sadhana that contact with the outside world has till lately been reduced to a minimum.

[. . .]

I think you know my present idea and the attitude towards life and work to which it has brought me. I have become confirmed in a perception which I had always, less clearly and dynamically then, but which has now become more and more evident to me, that the true basis of work and life is the spiritual, that is to say, a new consciousness to be developed only by Yoga. I see more and more manifestly that man can never get out of the futile circle the race is always treading until he has raised himself on to the new foundation. I believe also that it is the mission of India to make this great victory for the world. But what precisely was the nature of the dynamic power of this greater consciousness? What was the condition of its effective truth? How could it be brought down, mobilised, organised, turned upon life? How could our present instruments, intellect, mind, life, body be made true and perfect channels for this great transformation? This was the problem I have been trying to work out in my own experience and I have now a sure basis, a wide knowledge and some mastery of the secret. Not yet its fulness and complete imperative presence — therefore I have still to remain in retirement. For I am determined not to work in the external field till I have the sure and complete possession of this new power of action, — not to build except on a perfect foundation.

But still I have gone far enough to be able to undertake one work on a larger scale than before — the training of others to receive this Sadhana and prepare themselves as I have done, for without that my future work cannot even be begun. [. . .]

(*Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, pp. 260-61)

A VISITOR FROM MADRAS

9 APRIL 1923

A visitor from Madras to Pondicherry came in connection with non-cooperation work and met Sri Aurobindo.

Question: Dr. Bhagwandas and some others are trying to spiritualise politics — particularly the western institutions in our politics, and there is the village organisation work also. What is your opinion in this matter?

Sri Aurobindo: These are two things which must be kept apart. There are first those who want to work for political freedom and they fix that as their final goal. Secondly, there are those who want to organise the future life of the community in India.

These two require different kinds of organisations and they must be allowed to work with the utmost rapidity. It goes without saying that without organisation there can be no success in any work. But the political worker's path is straight. He need not go in for constructive work. He has to organise in the village something like the peasant organisations and associations in Ireland. When they are sufficiently well-organised then they can throw their weight into politics. The second path is much harder and longer and the worker's method also will be different. If he succeeds he is one of those who win the highest victory.

Of late, in some quarters, too much weight is being put upon village work. I know that in India it is a very important work to do. But I do not like people trying to picture future India as a mass of villages only. The village has a lot of life-problems and the villagers must be rescued from their living death. But they cannot be leaders of thought.

Question: Don't you think that some kind of political organisation and work is necessary in the villages and that the village also can be a centre of culture and creative activity?

Sri Aurobindo: Organisation and work in villages are certainly necessary, but I doubt very much whether the village could be a creative centre. At least in the past it was not, so far as we can see. In the past there were village communities but they do not seem to have been creative. The reason is that the man in the village has his view of life bound up with a small portion of land and things so that he cannot easily breathe that liberal and free air which is necessary for great creation. That is why leaders always came from the cities even in ancient times. I do not think that the villages in India, or anywhere in the world, are able to rule even in democracy. For creation a certain leisure and mental development are wanted.

Question: Do you think that in Russia what they have attempted is real democracy?

Sri Aurobindo: In Europe they have always tried for democracy. Real democracy has always failed, and failed because it is against human nature. There are certain men who are bound to govern. One must be prepared to face facts. Even in the democracies those men manage to rule, and one knows only too well the villagers do not. Only, those people govern in their name, and it sometimes makes them more free and reckless. In Russia — one does not know the exact situation — the attempt was for creating real rule of the people, i.e. of the village. You see in what it has ended? It has established again an oligarchy of the Lenin-party. One may even ask: What has Russia created? It has tried to destroy capital and thus tried to destroy and perhaps succeeded in destroying city life. It is trying mechanically to equalise men. But it is not a success. The Western social life rests on interests and rights. It depends upon the vitalistic existence of man which is largely governed by his rational mind helped by scientific inventions. Reason gives man the rigid methods of classification and mental construction and theory to justify his interests and rights, and science gives him the required efficiency, force and power. Thus he is sure of his goal. But one may say that, though organised and effective, European life is not organic. The view that it takes of man is a very imperfect view, and the ideal it sets before man an incomplete ideal. That is why you find there class-war and struggle for rights governed by the rational intellect. European life is very powerful because it can put the whole force of its life at once in operation by a coordination of all its members. In old times the ideal was different. They — the ancients — based their society on the structure of religion. I do not mean narrow religion but the highest law of our being. The whole social fabric was built up to fulfil that purpose. There was no talk in those days of individual liberty in the present sense of the term. But there was absolute communal liberty. Every community was completely free to develop its own Dharma, — the law of its being. Even the selection of the line was a matter of free choice for the individual.

I do not believe that because a man is governed by another man, or one class by another class, there is always oppression; for instance, the Brahmins never ruled but they were never oppressed by others, rather they oppressed other people. The government becomes useless and bad when one class or one nation keeps another down and governs it for its own benefit and does not allow the class or nation to follow its own Dharma.

In ancient times each community had its own Dharma and within itself it was independent. Every village, every city had its own organisation quite free from all political control and within that every individual was free — free to change and take up another line for his development. But all this was not put into a definite political unit. There were, of course, attempts at that kind of expression of life but they were only partially successful. The whole community in India was a very big one and the community-culture based on Dharma was not thrown into a kind of organisation which would resist external aggression; and ultimately we were brought to the present stage.

Now the problem is how to organise the future life of the country. I myself am

a communist in a certain sense but I cannot agree with the Russian method. One may ask: After all what has Russia created? Even among our present workers in India there is a lack of that definite idea as to what they are about and what kind of thing they want. That is the reason why men like Dr. Bhagwandas propose some mental constructions like asking men to go in for politics after 50 years of age and so on. That does not seem to me to be the correct method, and I believe whoever pursues it will encounter complete failure.

Question: Anything would be better than the present condition.

Sri Aurobindo: That is of course the common ground of agreement.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 25-28)



A DISCIPLE FROM MADRAS

11 APRIL 1923

Sri Aurobindo today met K. Rajangam from Madras. Rajangam asked him to give him the Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo: This is a very difficult path and therefore demands complete surrender and one-pointed concentration. One must be after the Truth alone. One has to be prepared to leave ideals of altruism, patriotism and even the aspiration for personal liberation and follow the Yoga for the sake of the Divine alone. Aspiration must be firm but it must not be only an intellectual aspiration; it must be of the inmost soul. It, then, means a call from Above. One has to take an irrevocable decision before he begins the Yoga. Such a decision may take time to arrive but it is better to wait till then.

Disciple: I have decided to take up the Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo: There are so many difficulties in this path — this Yoga is not meant for all. At one time I had the idea that this Yoga is for humanity, but now the idea is changed. This Yoga is for the Divine, for God. Man has first to attain the Truth-Consciousness and leave the salvation of mankind to that Consciousness. This does not mean that one has to abandon Life in this Yoga. My mission in life is to bring down the Supermind into Mind, Life and Body. Formerly I did not care if the sadhak accepted other influences, but now I have decided to take only those who will

admit the influence of this Yoga exclusively.

Disciple: What should be the sadhak's attitude with regard to physical illness?

Sri Aurobindo: He must first of all remain completely detached in the vital being and in the mind. The illness is the result of the working of the forces of Nature. He must use his will to reject the illness and one's will must be used as a representative of the Divine Will. When the Divine Will descends into the Adhara then it works no longer indirectly through the sadhak's will but directly and removes the illness. When the psychic being awakens then it is able to perceive the influence of the disease even before it enters the body. Not only does one perceive it, but one knows which organ is going to be attacked and one can keep off the attack with the help of the Higher Power.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 28-29)



ON CERTAIN QUESTIONS OF SADHANA

28 APRIL 1923

Sri Aurobindo generally used to see his disciples and visitors from outside, who came with the express purpose of seeing him, between 9 and 11 in the morning after he had a glance at the daily paper — The Hindu. These were very informal interviews and often intimate in the sense that the disciple would relate his experiences and difficulties, and visitors from outside generally sought his advice on spiritual matters or guidance in some public activity.

One such interview is given here to illustrate how he dealt with the questions of Sadhana.

Disciple: I have, at present, a very strong impulse to realise the infinite Transcendent Shakti. I want to know whether it is safer to leave the sadhana to the Universal or to the Divine?

Sri Aurobindo: The Transcendent and the Universal powers are not always exclusive of each other; they are almost mutual: when the Transcendent is realised in Mind it is the Universal. One has to have that realisation also.

Disciple: What is the distinction between the two?

Sri Aurobindo: The Universal is full of all sorts of things, — true as well as

false, good as well as bad, both divine and undivine. One has to get the knowledge and distinguish between them. It is not safe to open oneself to the Universal before one has the power of discrimination, because all kinds of ideas, forces, impulses, even *rākshasic* and *paishāchic* rush into him. There are schools of Yoga that consider this condition as ‘freedom’ or Mukti and they also take pleasure in the ‘Universal manifestation’, as they call it. But that is not perfection. Perfection only comes when the Transcendental Power manifests itself in human life, when the Infinite manifests itself in the finite.

Disciple: Cannot those who attain the Universal manifest perfection?

Sri Aurobindo: Generally, these are men who want to escape into the Universal — that is, into the Infinite, — the Sachchidananda, — on the mental plane. The Universal, as I told you, is full of all kinds of things, good and bad. The sadhaks, who enter into it and look upon it as their goal, accept whatever comes from it and, sometimes, behave in life with supreme indifference to morality. But their being is not transformed. Among our known sadhaks, K opened himself to the Universal, could not distinguish, or rather refused to distinguish and at the end went mad. Or take the case of L, an outsider, who was trying to remain in the Universal consciousness with the vital being full of all kinds of impurities. That is not perfection.

When the Divine Power — the Supramental Shakti — works, She establishes harmony between the various instruments of nature and also harmony in the whole of our life. R and people like him feel that such a harmonisation of the being is a limitation. But it is not a limitation — because that action is in keeping with the truth of our being and our becoming.

Disciple: Is the Transcendent Power the same as the Supramental Power?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, when that Power awakens, one knows not only the truth of being but also that of manifestation. There is inherent harmony on that plane between Truth-knowledge and Truth-action.

Disciple: Manifestation may mean limitation. Is that so?

Sri Aurobindo: No human manifestation can be illimitable or unlimited. But the manifestation in the limited should reflect the Transcendent Power. Human manifestation has a truth behind it and the Supermind shows the truth to be manifested. It is, really speaking, the clue to perfection.

Disciple: I feel a sense of pressure when the Power descends, particularly in the head.

Sri Aurobindo: One must get rid of the sense of pressure. The head indicates the seat of mind and gradually the Power should be made to descend below. When it descends below then it is not felt as pressure but as power which nothing can destroy. The whole being, down to the cells of the body, has to be prepared to receive the Power when it descends.

ON PHILANTHROPY AND YOGA

8 AUGUST 1923

Velji Thakersi Shah of Bidada, Cutch, met Sri Aurobindo.

V: I am going back to my place and will try to practise the Yoga there. I want to know whether I ought to cut myself away from all public activity.

Sri Aurobindo: There is no general rule that all who practise Yoga should give up all external work. Do you think that the work would stop if you gave it up?

V: There are one or two friends and co-workers to whom I can entrust the work; but even then it would require two or three hours of my attention.

Sri Aurobindo: Well, there are two or three considerations. First of all the necessity of giving up work depends on the demand from within. In the process of Sadhana there comes a stage when even two hours' attention to work is felt as a disturbance; then that work has to be given up. Or, if one finds that it is not the work that one has to do, then one has to give it up. So long as such an intense state of Sadhana does not come there is no harm in continuing the work.

V: I have started an organisation for the spread of our literature in my part of the country. What is your advice with regard to it?

Sri Aurobindo: I am neither for it nor against it in the intellectual sense. In this Yoga, external action is not to be abandoned. Sometimes action has to be done.

But ordinarily, we have not to do philanthropic work from the same motives. Philanthropy has an egoistic motive, however high it may be. We have to look beyond. For instance, we need not start schools for the Depressed Classes in order to serve humanity. We have to work as a sacrifice to God and we have therefore to go beyond mental ideals and constructions. When men begin work with these mental or ethical motives, they find them to be true and therefore they are not willing to leave them behind and go beyond. We have to take up the work from the yogic point of view. For example, it is necessary to spread our literature because it spreads the new thought. Some men may receive it correctly and some incorrectly. A movement is set up on the universal mental plane. So also in social work the whole frame is shaken by the new thought and in-as-much as it moves men out of the old groove it is useful. But we have to act from the inner motives.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 32-33)



ACTION AND SHAKTI

9 AUGUST 1923

Gokuldas of Cutch met Sri Aurobindo.

G: How to do action without desire? How can one be free from action and egoism?

Sri Aurobindo: The word 'egoism' is used in a very limited sense in English, — it means anything for the self. That which is not done for the self is regarded as unegoistic. But that is not so in Yoga. One can do all unselfish actions and have full egoism in him. He will have the egoism of the doer. Nishkama Karma means first desirelessness. You have to first establish that condition in which good or bad desires are absent. You must realise that it is the Power of God, His Shakti, that does the work in reality. All work, good and bad, in you and in the world, is Her work.

G: If a man takes up that attitude he may go on indiscriminately doing good or bad actions and say that God is doing them.

Sri Aurobindo: He may say so but he will get the return in proportion to the sense of egoism he puts into it.

G: What about the actions done in the past?

Sri Aurobindo: They are also in the hands of the Shakti. She knows what fruit to give and what not. When that kind of desirelessness is established you have to go on offering all your actions as a sacrifice to God. You must realise that it is the Shakti that does the work in yourself and She offers the same as a sacrifice to the Lord. The more desirelessness in the action, the purer the offering.

The action and the fruit of action both belong to God, — not to us. There should be no insistence on the fruit of good or unselfish action. When this is done then everything becomes easy.

G: How will a man act when he has no impulse of desire?

Sri Aurobindo: When you have realised desirelessness then there will be no impulse of either good or bad desire in yourself. Then there will be an impulsion from the Shakti and She takes up the work. Slowly the whole of your being opens and everything comes from Above. We merely become the instrument.

G: But how to distinguish between the work that the Shakti impels and that which is prompted by our lower self?

Sri Aurobindo: In order to distinguish the work intended by the Shakti and that dictated by the lower nature you have to be very careful. You must develop the power of looking within. When you look within you must first realise yourself as the Purusha, that is to say, the being quite separate from the movements of Prakriti, Nature, going on in the Prana (the vital parts), the Chitta, the Mind etc. Any movement that arises in Prakriti has to be rejected and anything that comes from Above has to be accepted. Not only must you separate yourself, but the Purusha must become the calm and

passive witness. Thus there will be a portion in yourself which will be quiet, unaffected by anything in Prakriti. The calm of the Sakshi, witness, then extends to the nature and then nature remains quite unmoved by any disturbance. You can not merely remain unmoved but also, as Anumanta, give the sanction to certain movements of nature and withhold it from others.

G: Is this the Yoga? No Asanas, no Pranayama!

Sri Aurobindo: It is not so simple as it appears. If there is sincerity in the offering then the help comes from Above. You must also have persistence.

G: It might require the learning which, I am afraid, I have not got.

Sri Aurobindo: Learning is not indispensable. The Yoga is done by the Shakti only. You do not know it because you are not aware of the higher movement. You have only to keep the attitude described and be sincere in the offering.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 33-34)



THE WORKING OF THE HIGHER POWER

28 SEPTEMBER 1923

Disciple: What is the nature of realisation in this Yoga?

Sri Aurobindo: In this Yoga we want to bring down the Truth-Consciousness into the whole being — no part of the being left out. This can be done by the Higher Power itself. What you have to do is to open yourself to it.

Disciple: As the Higher Power is there why does it not work in all men — consciously?

Sri Aurobindo: Because man, at present, is shut up in his mental being, his vital nature and physical consciousness and their limitations. You have to open yourself. By an opening I mean an aspiration in the heart for the coming down of the Power that is above, and a will in the Mind, or above the Mind, open to it.

The first thing this working of the Higher Power does is to establish Shanti, peace, in all the parts of the being and an opening above. This peace is not mere mental Shanti, it is full of power and, whatever action takes place in it, Samata, equality, is its basis, and the Shanti and Samata are never disturbed. What comes from above is peace, power and joy. It also brings about changes in various parts of our nature so that they can bear the pressure of the Higher Power.

Knowledge also progressively develops showing all in our being that is to be thrown out and what is to be retained. In fact, knowledge and guidance both come and you have constantly to consent to the guidance. The progress may be more in one direction than in another. But it is the Higher Power that works. The rest is a matter of experience and the movement of the Shakti.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 34-35)



A MEETING WITH SRI AUROBINDO IN 1923

*From a lecture delivered by the poet and writer G. V. Subbarao
before the Eswara Library, Kakinada.*

It was in October, 1923, that I first saw Sri Aurobindo in his Ashram at Pondicherry. He was seated on a small cushioned chair, in a rather narrow verandah on the first floor of his house in which he lived for [nearly thirty] years. There were about a dozen chairs in the room and a small table in front, with papers, flowers and a few books on it. There was a small time-piece to indicate the progress of time, because everything here must be done according to precision and order. Sri Aurobindo was dazzling bright in colour — it was said that in his earlier years, he was more dark than brown — and had a long, rather thin beard which was well-dressed, with streaks of white strewn here and there. The figure was slender and not much taller than Gandhiji's, but a little more fleshy. The eyes were big and elongated to a point and their looks were keen and piercing like shafts. He was dressed in fine cotton — not khaddar evidently, but Swadeshi, hand-woven cloth. He had only two cloths on, one a dhoti and the other an upper cloth, worn in the traditional fashion of an *Upaveetam*, i.e. right arm and shoulder exposed. The lower part of the legs was slender, feminine, and the feet were hidden in two small slippers.

His voice was low but quite audible, quick and musical to a point. He was fast in his flow, clear like a crystal and analytical to a degree. In a fifteen-minute talk, he gave me his philosophy in a nutshell. He was simple and courteous, outspoken and free in his interrogations. It seemed as though he could know a man by a sweep of his eyes and read men's minds from a survey of their photographs. He appeared as one highly cognisant of the value of time; and at the end of the appointed fifteen minutes,

he stood up looking at the clock, as if intimating to me to retire. He was kind throughout, as to a child; but I could discern enough in his demeanour to conclude that he could be stern and imperious when required. To his disciples, he was loving like a Guru, but demands absolute surrender before one can be admitted to his heart's domain.

(From *THE SUNDAY TIMES*, May 6, 1951)



THIS YOGA — ‘AN ADVENTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN’

23 DECEMBER 1923

Prof. R. B. Athavale met Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo: What is your idea of Yoga?

Athavale: I have come to learn that from you.

Sri Aurobindo: That is not possible. How can you undertake to go in for it if you have no idea about it?

Athavale: I need the peace of mind which would be the first Result of this Yoga. Secondly, I want to know what I should do in my life. I have read *The Yoga and Its Objects* and I would like to attain the ideal set forth in it.

Sri Aurobindo: Peace, of course, is the first condition of any Yoga and it must not be only mental peace. It must be deeper still, it must pervade all the parts of the being and it must descend from Above.

What is your idea of Kartavyam Karma?

Athavale: It is my duty in life.

Sri Aurobindo: Kartavyam Karma does not mean duty. Duty is a western notion. It is a wrong interpretation of the text of the Gita. It means: that which should be done, that which is ordained.

It is possible to know the Kartavyam Karma in that sense, if one can rise to something beyond Mind. You spoke of *The Yoga and Its Objects*. It was written at a time when my Sadhana had not reached its perfection. It marks a certain stage of my development. But it is not complete. I am not following the idea that is in it.

At present what I am doing is the Supramental Yoga. Man, as constituted at present, is a very imperfect manifestation of the Divine — he is very crude. It is so because man is living in an envelope of ignorance — in Mind, Life and Body — so

that he is not conscious of the Reality that is beyond Mind. The Supramental Power is above the Mind. What I am trying to do at present is to call down the Higher Power to govern Mind, Life and Body. The object of this Yoga is not the service of humanity, or the ordinary perfection of man but the evolution of the Supramental Power in the cyclic evolution of the Spirit in the material universe. What one has to do is to rend the veil — the thick veil — that divides the Mind from the Supermind. That work a man cannot do by himself.

Athavale: Then where is the place for the use of will?

Sri Aurobindo: Well, your will *has* a place. It is used first of all to remove the lower movements, e.g. desires and thoughts etc. Secondly, you can will for the working of the Higher Power by putting a stop to the actions that belong to Mind, Life and Body — i.e. of the ignorant Nature. The first result would be a calm much deeper than the mental calm.

Athavale: What about the work for humanity?

Sri Aurobindo: We are not concerned with that at all primarily. What one puts forth generally outside in the form of action is what one internally is. Our first aim is not to work for humanity in the current sense of the term, but to found life on a Higher Consciousness than the present ignorant and limited consciousness of Mind, Life and Body. At present, man — I mean the average man — is physical and vital in his nature, using mind for satisfying his vital being. We want to leave mind — and intellect — behind and find a Higher Consciousness. You may call it Nirvana, Passive Brahman, Sachchidananda or Higher Power or by any name.

So, our first task is to find God and base life on that Consciousness. In that process what is necessary for humanity will naturally be done. But that is not our direct aim. Ours is a tremendous task. It is an adventure in which one must be prepared to leave behind his desires and passions, intellectual preferences and mental constructions in order to enable the Higher Power to do its work. You have to see whether you can give your consent to the radical transformation that is inevitable.

Athavale: Yes, I am prepared for the gamble.

Sri Aurobindo: It is only one minute back that I told you about the Supramental Yoga and how is it that you have come to a decision? You do not know the hazard. The acceptance of this Yoga means a great and decisive step in one's life and you have to give consent to the working of the Higher Power in order to be able to go through. There should be nothing in the mental or the vital being which would come in the way of the higher working.

Athavale: I have been trying to prepare myself for the last three years. I wanted to come here three years ago. But I did not consider myself fit for this Yoga at that time. So far as I can see, I have no mental idea left except the freedom of my country. There was a time when I would have postponed the spiritual life for India's freedom.

Sri Aurobindo: You need not do it now; it is a thing guaranteed. But you cannot make even that a condition for entering this Yoga. It is a high adventure, as I told you.

It is not like the other yogic systems where you get some touch of the Higher Reality and leave the rest untransformed. My Yoga makes demands that have to be met, — it is a radical transition from the present state of human consciousness. We accept life but that does not mean that in this Yoga there is no renunciation. It only means we do not annul any of the faculties of the human being. What we put forth is not something mental, vital or physical but that which comes from the Supramental.

Athavale: I would do as you suggest; but at present I do not know any working higher than the Mind. What is to be done till then?

Sri Aurobindo: You have to make a choice: the individual is absolutely free in this Yoga. I cannot crush your individuality. I mean, I can, but it is not allowed in this Yoga. So, the working of the Higher Power depends upon the choice you make.

Athavale: But you are there to protect us.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, I can protect you if you have the absolute faith and make the right choice. If you make the wrong choice I cannot protect you. You must know that this is not a simple affair at all. It is not a revolt against the British Government which anyone can easily do. It is, in fact, a revolt against the whole universal Nature and so one must think deeply before enrolling oneself with me.

There will be tremendous forces that will attack you and you have constantly to go on making the right choice and giving consent to the working of the Higher Truth and thereby prove your strength. If you begin this Yoga the first result is likely to be a feverish internal commotion, Ashanti, rather than the Shanti that you are in search of. And when you come to the material plane, — there especially, the odds are almost insurmountable. I have made my watchword: Victory or Death.

Athavale: What is the meaning of coming to the physical and material plane? Does it mean that when the Supermind comes down to the material plane then the difficulties are very great?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. There even I do not know the result. I have received only an indication from within that it is going to be. Yet I myself do not know the end of my adventure. Very few in the past have followed this Yoga and none has conquered the material plane. That is why it is an adventure into the Unknown. One must have faith and make the right choice.

*

27 DECEMBER 1923

Prof. R. B. Athavale had another interview with Sri Aurobindo before his departure.

Sri Aurobindo: Have you something to say to me?

Athavale: I have begun to practise the Yoga in the way you have asked me to.

I find it very congenial and profitable.

Sri Aurobindo: You have to continue it. What you know generally as your self is only the surface being and its superficial workings. What man thinks to be *himself* is only a movement in Nature, — a movement in the universal Mind, universal Life and universal Matter. What you have to do is to separate, or rather detach, yourself from the movements of nature. You will then find that you are not only watching the universal action of Nature but consenting to it.

The movement of watching what is going on in you is not the separation of the true Purusha, but the Mental Purusha. As the Purusha you can not only watch as the Sakshi, but act as the giver of sanction, Anumanta. You can stop the movement of Nature that is going on in you.

Athavale: Yes. I found I could control my thought or imagination by sheer force of will.

Sri Aurobindo: You have not to suppress the natural movement. That would only mean that it would remain there, or would go deeper in your nature and then rear its head again at some convenient opportunity. What you have to do is to reject the movement, to cast it out of your nature. You can do that by detaching yourself more and more from all movements.

Athavale: Where is the seat of the Purusha?

Sri Aurobindo: Above the head is the true seat of the Purusha.

Athavale: Should I try to locate the psychological functions in different centres of the body?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, Yoga means growing more and more conscious, even the movement of the subliminal self must be felt and experienced. The centre of vision and will is between the eyebrows. The centre of the psychic being is in the heart — not in the emotional being but behind it. The vital being is centred in the navel. All this is not the real soul, — it is Nature. The soul is deeper within. The direct method of the Supramental Yoga would be to know the subliminal or the psychic being and open it to the Higher Power. But it is a drastic method, and if the Adhar is not pure then it would lead to a mixture of Truth and falsehood, of what comes from Above and what comes from below, and such a state is dangerous in certain cases. You need not take up that method but this preparatory practice which is regarded as very high in other Yogas, is really the first essential step in the Supramental Yoga.

When you separate the Purusha from Prakriti you experience a certain calm. That calm is the Purusha consciousness watching the action of Prakriti. It is what is called the Silent Witness. That calm deepens as you detach yourself more and more from Prakriti. You also feel that it is wide, that it is the Lord. It can stop any movement of nature though its will may not be all at once effective; after a time it must prevail. In order to find this Purusha consciousness you have to reject everything in the lower nature, i.e., desires, feelings and mental ideas.

Athavale: Should we not have the desire to practise the Yoga?

Sri Aurobindo: No.

Athavale: Then how can we practise the Yoga?

Sri Aurobindo: You must have the will for it: will and desire are two distinct things. You have to distinguish between true and false movements in the nature and give your consent to the true ones.

Athavale: We must use our Buddhi for distinguishing the true from the false.

Sri Aurobindo: It is not by Buddhi that you perceive these things, — it is by an inner perception or vision. It is not the intellect but something higher that sees. It is the Higher Mind in which that inner perception, intuition etc. take place.

All true knowledge is by identity, not at all by the intellectual reason. You may put the knowledge into an intellectual form by the Buddhi, but the knowledge is essentially by identity. You know anger by being one with it, though you can detach yourself and see it as something happening in you. All knowledge is like that.

The discrimination therefore is not rational but automatic by an inner perception. There is also a faculty called revelation which represents the Truth in terms of figures; there is also inspiration which is heard as a voice either in the mind or in the heart. Even this is a very hard practice. One has to be on guard against the lower movements like self-sufficiency, vanity etc., and reject them.

Athavale: I want to know what should be the way of my family life. Should I observe Brahmacharya?

Sri Aurobindo: We do not make rules in this Yoga. Of course, if you followed the direct Supramental Yoga then it would be compulsory. But even in a preparatory yoga it is better if you can observe Brahmacharya. You have to grow from humanity into something higher and so you must get away from the animal level. In the Supramental Yoga no lower movements should be indulged in from the lower poise.

Athavale: So it is better to observe Brahmacharya?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, if you can observe it, it is better, though one does not make a hard and fast rule about it. There are three things in the vital nature which are very great obstacles in the Yoga — there are many others besides but they are of minor importance. 1. Lust. 2. Pride and Vanity — that “I am a great sadhak” etc. 3. Ambition for success or greed for money.

Athavale: I want to know how I am to receive spiritual help from you.

Sri Aurobindo: That depends upon your faith and sincerity.

Athavale: But suppose I am not here and stay at my place and find some difficulty, then how should I receive your help?

Sri Aurobindo: You must detach yourself from the obstacle and watch it and then you have to call down the help from Above. You can always receive my help if once the relation is established. Man is not confined to the physical body. The real soul has almost nothing to do with the physical man. It is not necessary for me to give my thought to you, the subliminal self can give the necessary help even without the thought-mind knowing anything about it.

Athavale: So I can go to my place now?

Sri Aurobindo: Keep writing about your experiences and your progress.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 35-42)



TWO BROTHERS WISH TO SEE SRI AUROBINDO

1 JANUARY 1924

Two Tamil brothers, the elder of whom was a pleader, wanted to meet Sri Aurobindo this morning. They claimed to be guided by the spirit of their eldest brother, Jagannathan, who had died at Rangoon on 1 December 1918. They brought with them three notebooks containing his communications and some automatic writings. The younger brother was the medium. The notebooks were sent up and Sri Aurobindo glanced at the pages.

Sri Aurobindo: Some answers are meaningless. The definition of ‘genius’ does not make any sense.

This man must first of all ascertain whether it is his brother who is communicating with him. And secondly, how does he know that what the spirit writes or says, is under my inspiration?

Generally what happens in such cases is that the spirit tells just the thing that is present in the subconscious part of the medium; the spirit that communicates knows it and gives it out; or if someone present at the planchette has some thought in his subconscious or conscious being the spirit gives it out.

Of course, spirits can act on their own through mediums, or those who have passed away or those who are living can communicate through them. But in that case the medium must be very powerful and pure.

(A disciple asked about the brothers’ request for an interview.)

Sri Aurobindo: If they come to me because of the spirit’s guidance then it is not sufficient preparation for the Yoga.

It was conveyed to the brothers that the demand for the Yoga should not depend upon a planchette communication; it must come from a deeper

source. And they must leave the judgment about their fitness for Yoga to Sri Aurobindo.

The report was that, in addition to the guidance of the spirit of their dead brother, they had seen Sri Aurobindo in a dream asking them to come to him. They were disappointed when they were informed that they could not meet Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo: The younger brother who has allowed himself to be mediumised should be told that it is very dangerous for him to meddle with this spirit-world without proper knowledge. It is especially dangerous for people who are themselves not strong.

He should, after giving up this practice, make his mind strong by Karma Yoga. It will require him to give up his desires and his ego. He can do his actions in the spirit of devotion, offering them all as a sacrifice to God. He can thus practise dedication of all his actions to God and try to see Him in all men and in all happenings. That would be his meditation.

At present he cannot take up this Yoga because this is a Yoga of self-surrender in which he has to open himself to a Higher Power. But as he has already opened himself to other spirits such a passive state would not be good for him. All sorts of spirits would come and try to take possession of his being. So it is not safe for him to take up this Yoga, apart from other considerations.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 42-43)



MENTAL SOLUTIONS AND THE SPIRITUAL METHOD

3 JANUARY 1924

Amritlal Sheth of Saurashtra saw Sri Aurobindo this morning for a few minutes.

Amritlal: I want to know how I can keep down weaknesses of my own nature. If the remedy requires me to give up the work that I am doing, I am afraid, my nature would not allow it. I am painfully conscious of my own shortcomings.

Sri Aurobindo: Weaknesses are natural to man; in fact, I have never met a person who was perfect.

Amritlal: I feel elated when people honour me.

Sri Aurobindo: If people honour you it is none of your concern to accept the honour. You have to become indifferent to it and go on doing your work.

Amritlal: What is the way to remove these weaknesses?

Sri Aurobindo: One way is to keep them down by a sort of mental control or by making your will strong. Of course, you can't get rid of them in that way. But you can keep them down so that they may not trouble you.

My way of dealing with them is quite different. What one speaks of as check or control is always a moral control. All such solutions are mental while I would deal with them spiritually. That method is quite different.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 45-46)



THIS YOGA NOT LIKE OTHER YOGAS

3 JANUARY 1924

Raghunath P. Thakar, a Brahmin from Virpur near Rajkot, came on 1 January to see Sri Aurobindo. He had been to some saint at Rupal (near Kalol), had practised Raja Yoga, also some Hatha Yoga, and met Nathuram Sharma in Kathiawad.

Sri Aurobindo: What is the aim of the Yoga you want to practise, that is to say, what do you expect from this Yoga?

Raghunath: *Vṛttinirodha* — the control of the waves and vibrations of consciousness — and to be one with God.

Sri Aurobindo: That is the aim of Raja Yoga and you should go to a Rajayogi Guru.

Raghunath: I have come to take up any path that you may point out. I always had the idea that I should get something from you. I am ready to do what you tell me.

Sri Aurobindo: Your vital and physical systems are very weak and this Yoga makes very strong demands. In this Yoga we do not run away from the difficulties so all of them are concentrated against the sadhak. Therefore, one must be very strong to fight out the forces successfully.

Raghunath: I would do what you ask me to do.

Sri Aurobindo: I will consider the matter and let you know.

In the meantime it was brought to Sri Aurobindo's notice that this man had tried to practise Hatha Yoga without a Guru and had begun with Khechari Mudra, Trataka and Uddiyana accompanied by Kapalabhati Pranayama and ended by being sick. Raghunath was all along thinking that Sri Aurobindo was a great Hathayogi, because he meditated with open eyes and was able to do Utthapana, levitation.

Disciple: Raghunath says that he has made up his mind.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, but I have not made up my mind.

Disciple: In Khechari Mudra the lower connecting link of the tongue is to be cut.

Sri Aurobindo: I think Keshavananda at Chandod also had his tongue freed by cutting it for Khechari.

Disciple: What is, after all, the result of Khechari Mudra?

Sri Aurobindo: I believe it leads to a kind of trance which may give a certain Ananda.

Disciple: The idea seems to be to invert the freed tongue so as to close the passage of breathing. The two nostrils are called the Ida and Pingala currents of Prana. The third current is Sushumna on the crown of the head. When these two are stopped by inverting the tongue and blocking the passage of breathing, then Sushumna begins to function. The theory is that Amrita, nectar, is dropping from the Sushumna even now but as the tongue does not taste it, man does not enjoy the nectar. There is also a tradition that in Khechari Mudra one is able to fly.

Sri Aurobindo: It only gives a kind of trance and a consequent Ananda: I do not know what else it does.

Disciple: And about Trataka?

Sri Aurobindo: It only clears the sight and ultimately helps in opening the subtle sight between the eye-brows. I don't think there is any other use of it.

On the 6th January Sri Aurobindo gave his final decision about Raghunath P. Thakar.

Sri Aurobindo: He has his own ideas and if he wants to practise Raja Yoga he must go to a Rajayogi Guru. For this Yoga his mind must undergo a radical change. My giving him the Yoga at present is out of the question. If he wants to prepare himself he can practise the separation of Purusha and Prakriti.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 43-45)



ON THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT IN PONDICHERRY

6 JANUARY 1924

Some visitors from the Cocanada [modern Kakinada] Congress came to Pondicherry and according to the French law they were asked by the C.I.D. police, usually watching the Ashram gate, to declare themselves. The crowd was large and, being fresh from the Congress, not in a mood to submit to the demand of the French law. So it moved towards the sea, and one or two sadhaks also along with it. The French Police in uniform approached these visitors and asked them to go to the Police Station for declaration.

There was argument and some scuffle and the visitors wanted to take the matter to the court. This would cast a reflection on the Ashram as the visitors had come to it and also as some sadhaks were moving with them. Since this affected the Ashram, the information was conveyed to Sri Aurobindo. He sent word that "No case should be proceeded with, and things must be settled with the Police Commissioner."

But the visitors — some of them at any rate — wanted to make a case. This information was also sent to Sri Aurobindo. Generally he did not come out between 1 and 4.30 p.m. But as the matter was urgent he came down at 3 o'clock.

Sri Aurobindo: What is all this trouble about? I have been staying here so long and I have my own status with the French Government. They have not only given me protection but treated me with great courtesy. If the visitors want to make a case it is their own look-out, but I do not want to make any case. Our business is with the officials and not with the policeman. If we have to say anything we must go and inform the officer and not talk to the policeman. It is absurd for me to think of going to the court. I am not only a non-cooperator, I am an enemy of the British Empire. If the visitors, who are non-cooperators, want to make a case it is their business.

Sri Aurobindo then instructed two disciples to go to the Police Commissioner and inquire about the matter and make the position of the Ashram clear by saying: "We do not invite visitors; so it is the affair of the Police to deal with them. But none of the inmates of the Ashram should be treated in the same manner."

Next day he explained his stand.

Sri Aurobindo: It is an attempt, once more, to break the quiet atmosphere which I have succeeded in creating here with great difficulty. The forces have been trying to

create the old political situation. When I first came here it was a very difficult situation. Now our connection with the French Government is purely formal, almost mechanical.

These visitors bring so many things with them and they may cast them on people here. I do not mean it is their fault. But one must keep them separate.

(*Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 46-47)



NO STRUCTURE WITHOUT STRONG BASE

10 JANUARY 1924

A young man from Tinnevelly [modern Tirunelveli], knowing Sanskrit, came this morning and wanted to see Sri Aurobindo. He said he had received inspiration from parā shakti to go to Sri Aurobindo who is Bhagawan. He was directly going up the staircase without asking anyone when he was stopped. It seemed that he had been fasting for some days; he brought fruits to offer to Sri Aurobindo.

Disciple: Like the other man, shall I send this one to Ramana Maharshi?

Sri Aurobindo: He won't, probably, go, because the Para Shakti has not asked him to go there. Very inconvenient Para Shakti! She has asked him to come here!

There are only two ways. One is to send him to X (*one of the disciples*).

Disciple: I have hardly finished with Y.

Sri Aurobindo (*to another disciple*): But when he turns up tomorrow what are you going to tell him?

Disciple: I will tell him it is impossible to see you.

Sri Aurobindo: What has he come for?

Disciple: He says he has come for Maha Mantra. I asked him if he was ready to do anything you ask him to do. He said "Yes." Then I told him you might ask him to go back. He said he would if you asked him to. He can talk in Sanskrit.

Sri Aurobindo: That means he wants to see me! I have no time to listen to his Sanskrit.

16 JANUARY 1924

The man who came with the inspiration from Para Shakti was finally seen by Sri Aurobindo who found that his physical and vital beings were weak and his mind lacked discretion. He therefore decided to send him back. "These parts — the physical, the vital and the mental — are the basis; unless the ground is there no structure can be raised on it," he said.

(*Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 47-48)

**THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRACY****5 JANUARY 1925**

Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) was one of the three most prominent Hindu Nationalist members of the Indian National Congress. He was part of the Lal-Bal-Pal trio, the other two members being Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal. They formed the extremist faction of the Indian National Congress, as opposed to the moderate one led first by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Lala Lajpat Rai led the Punjab protests against the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and the Non-Cooperation Movement. He was arrested several times.

Lala Lajpat Rai came with Dr. Nihalchand, Krishna Das, and Purushottam Das Tandon to meet Sri Aurobindo.

Purushottam Das Tandon (1882-1962) joined the bar of Allahabad High Court in 1908 as a junior to Tej Bahadur Sapru. He gave up practice in 1921 to concentrate on public affairs. He was a member of Congress Party since his student days in 1899. In 1906, he represented Allahabad in the AICC. He was associated with the Congress Party committee that studied the Jallianwala Bagh incident in 1919. He was also a part of the Servants of the People Society. In the 1920s and 1930s he was arrested for participating in the Non-Cooperation Movement and Salt Satyagraha respectively. He was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India in 1946.

Lajpat Rai and Sri Aurobindo met privately for about forty-five minutes; the rest of the company waited outside. From their faces when

they came out, it seemed both of them had agreed on many points.

Sri Aurobindo then met the other members of the party. He turned to Purushottam Das Tandon.

Sri Aurobindo: How are things getting on at Allahabad?

P. T.: We are trying to carry out Mahatmaji's programme.

Lajpat Rai: Are you really trying to carry it out? (*Turning to Sri Aurobindo*)

They are trying to capture local bodies.

P. T.: I am not in favour of that programme, because it will lead in the end to lust for power and then personal differences and jealousies would also creep in. We cannot, in that case, justify the high hopes which people have about our work.

Lajpat Rai: They expect you to usher in the golden age.

Sri Aurobindo: But why do you give them such high hopes?

Lajpat Rai: In the democratic age you have to.

Sri Aurobindo: Why?

Lajpat Rai: If you want to get into the governing bodies you must make big promises; that is the nature of democracy!

Sri Aurobindo: Then, why democracy at all? The lust for power will always be there. You can't get over it by shutting out all positions of power; our workers must get accustomed to it. They must learn to hold the positions for the nation. This difficulty would be infinitely greater when you get Swaraj. These things are there even in Europe. The Europeans are just the same as we are. Only, they have got discipline — which we lack — and a keen sense of national honour which we have not got.

P. T.: The Europeans are superior to us in this respect.

Sri Aurobindo: You can't prevent such weaknesses. What you have to do is to bring about that discipline and that sense of national honour in our people.

By the way, how do you like the Charkha programme ?

P. T.: I like it very much and I am trying to carry it out in U.P.

Sri Aurobindo: I don't understand how it is going to bring Swaraj.

P. T.: In the absence of a better programme, it disciplines the people and makes them do something for the nation. It brings to the front the idea of common action for a definite end.

Sri Aurobindo: The Charkha has its own importance, but it cannot bring Swaraj.

P. T.: It may if one realises the Bhava — the feeling — that is behind spinning.

Sri Aurobindo: I am afraid, you can't get that Bhava from me. You can only get the work of Charkha with a sentry over me! (*Laughter*)

Disciple: But why only Charkha? Why not the oil-mill? It is also common action.

P. T.: Yes, I know that India lost her independence even when there was the Charkha. But as there is no other programme we are following it.

Sri Aurobindo: What we require is not an outward action merely — like spinning — but discipline and a sense of national honour.

Lajpat Rai: Yes, what we lack is the sense of a common interest in the midst of conflicting interests.

Sri Aurobindo: Quite so.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 54-56)



ON SADHANA

12 JULY 1925

Velji Thakersi Shah met Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo: What about your sadhana?

V: It is going on well.

Sri Aurobindo: “Well” means?

V: It is at present duller than it was before my physical illness.

Sri Aurobindo: What is the kind of experience you are getting?

V: At first the Power was working on the mental plane. Now it is working on the vital and even below the vital plane.

Sri Aurobindo: How do you know that it is working on the vital plane?

V: When the mind becomes peaceful I am able to see desires and impulses etc. in the vital.

Sri Aurobindo: When you have got the peace what things do you perceive coming into you?

V: There are thoughts that continue to come even when there is peace. Sometimes the mind gets identified with them and moves with them. Sometimes it is able to remain separate.

Sri Aurobindo: Have you experienced the separate existence of the vital being?

V: Yes, I have.

Sri Aurobindo: How did you know that it was the vital being?

V: Because I am able to see desires and impulses that come in it.

Sri Aurobindo: That you can see even with the mind; have you experienced the existence of the vital being separate from the mind?

V: Yes, seven or eight times I had the experience of a separate vital body (*sheath*) of my own. And I felt its existence quite separate from the mind. Sometimes that vital body used to go out also.

Sri Aurobindo: How far has the peace descended in you?

V: It has descended down to the navel.

Sri Aurobindo: Do you not feel it descending further down?

V: Sometimes it descends down to the toes of the feet.

(After a pause)

V: How should I proceed now in my sadhana?

Sri Aurobindo: You have to do two things during your stay here:

1. The peace that you feel in the mind must be constant and permanent and you should feel yourself separate from all the thoughts, ideas and suggestions that may pass through your mind. That is to say, you should have the constant experience of the Purusha consciousness. This basis of peace must be there whether you are meditating or not.

2. You should have an aspiration to separate your vital being and have its experience as a separate entity, so that the vital would be able to see the effect of other universal (*vital*) forces upon its own self. These are the two things you must try to establish during your stay here.

V: Do you find in me some progress?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, there is.

V: How far has purification taken place?

Sri Aurobindo: There is not one meaning of the word 'purity'. It depends upon how you understand the word. But what I call essential purity can be attained by making the basis of peace firm and establishing the whole consciousness in the Purusha firmly. When one is firmly established in the Purusha consciousness then one has also got a basis for purity because the Purusha is ever-pure, Nitya Shuddha; he does not require purity, he is inherently pure. Afterwards the purity that remains to be established is that of Prakriti. Once one is established in the Purusha consciousness the Prakriti automatically begins to get purified.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 56-58)



ON THE GAYATRI MANTRA

21 SEPTEMBER 1925

Narmadashankar B. Vyas, a native of Lunavada, Gujarat, came here some days back and wanted to take up Yoga from Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo refused to give him the Yoga saying: "He has some demand, but I would not give him this Yoga."

A photo of Vyas was taken and shown to Sri Aurobindo. It made a favourable impression, as he found on reading it that the psychic could open [. . .]. He permitted Vyas to see him after seven days, i.e., today.

Sri Aurobindo: This is a very difficult Yoga and it makes no less demands on the sadhak than the old methods. Everything is to be given up to the Power that is above the Mind. This Yoga accepts life but that does not mean that it accepts the ignorance of life.

I can't give you my Yoga as I do not find the necessary capacity in your nature. But, if you like, I can give you something that may prepare you for this Yoga.

Vyas: Very well.

Sri Aurobindo: Did you follow any religious practice in your life?

Vyas: I did only Gayatri Japa for some years when I was young.

Sri Aurobindo: Do you know the meaning of the Gayatri Mantra?

Vyas: It is a great Shakti but I do not know the meaning.

Sri Aurobindo: It means: "We choose the Supreme Light of the divine Sun; we aspire that it may impel our minds."

The Sun is the symbol of the divine Light that is coming down and Gayatri gives expression to the aspiration asking that divine Light to come down and give impulsion to all the activities of the mind.

In this Yoga also we want to bring down that divine Sun to govern not only the mind but the vital and the physical being also. It is a very difficult effort. All cannot bear the Light of the Sun when it comes down. Gayatri chooses the Divine Light of the Truth asking it to come down and govern the mind. It is the capacity to bear the Light that constitutes the fitness for this Yoga.

You can meditate on this Mantra, keeping in mind the meaning, and you can aspire also to become fit for this Yoga. When you are able to fix your mind you may remember any one of the forms of the Godhead. You can pray to your Ishta-Devata that he may make you fit for this Yoga and that he may come and work in you.

Really speaking, this Yoga is not done by the power of man; it is done by the Divine Power and so it can bring about every change in the capacity of the sadhak.

You should direct the aspiration towards the Supreme. When you have succeeded in doing it, you should watch all your inner activities and see what they are. Irrespective

of whatever you find there you must stay calm. This calm you must go on deepening so much so that you should feel quiet, wide, large in consciousness. If you can establish this calm you will be able to do this Yoga.

The calm must become deep and so settled that even while doing ordinary work you should feel it within yourself and see the activity as something quite separate from yourself.

You should have a fixed time for meditation and must be regular in doing it. You can write about your experience from time to time.

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 2007 Ed., pp. 58-59)



EXTRACTS FROM THE NOTES OF A DISCIPLE AFTER HIS TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

October 28, 1925 — First day at Pondicherry

A.G.: In this yoga what is required first and foremost is calmness. This calmness must be brought down even to the physical.

Do you have any attachments?

I: Attachment? Yes, I have — nothing big — small movements such as the desire to smoke . . .

A.G.: No harm in that.

*

I: At times I shed tears due to emotional delight.

A.G.: Is it associated with anything or does it take place automatically?

I: At times it is associated with your name while at others it happens automatically.

[**A.G. remained silent. Then I asked him**]

I: May I join the morning meditation?

A.G.: Yes.

I: The evening conversation?

A.G.: Yes.

(I touched his feet and took my leave.)

*

November 6

I: In the letter to Shreesh-babu you had said: It is not possible to suggest oneself to the supramental — calm will to call down calmness. Is this too ‘suggesting . . . oneself to the supramental’?

A.G.: No, no — I had said it *a propos* a new method of cure by suggesting. One can’t become a superman through such a suggestion as “I’ve become superman, I’ve become superman”. The maintaining of calm will can’t be suggested.

I: Isn’t calling down with one’s will against the spirit of true surrender?

A.G.: No. You are talking of absolute passivity. If you merely open yourself passively, the Higher Power may come or it may not. There may also be chaos and confusion within you.

*

November 17

I: What is the difference between mental calmness and mental passivity? Sometimes I see that my mind has become wholly passive, there is no activity, it is calm — again at times I see that there is activity in the mind and simultaneously calmness too.

A.G.: What you say about mental passivity is not correct — then the mind becomes more calm — in this yoga *chitta-vritti-nirodha* is not necessary. Don’t confuse it with the old practice of yogasadhana. If you remain totally passive many bad things may come from the universal; horizontal forces of Nature may attack which may cause confusion. You have to establish calmness within the mental activity.

*

November 17

I: Meditation by means of *Prakriti* —

A.G.: What?

I: I mean if I concentrate above the head and meditate, often the mental consciousness does not remain awake — can it be harmful?

A.G.: Then the Higher *Prakriti* works, there will be no harm. You were going to say something about meditation by means of *Prakriti*. . .

I: It is there in your “*Saptachatustaya*”.

A.G.: That is only a programme of work — what is there in it? — show it to me some time.

I: In that state I feel as though I am going up — an upward movement — the

mental witness is not alert. Is it a movement of the vital force?

A.G.: There is a will in the mind, there is a will also in the vital mind — vital force is a separate thing. You have to watch the play of each one. Often the vital will, rushing upward, attacks the *buddhi* (intelligence) and tries to make it serve its purpose. First of all it must be controlled by the mental will. Later when the Higher will descends all these are transformed. Until the Higher will descends, the vital being must be kept under control with the help of the mental will.

(Reproduction from memory after five days — so it is doubtful whether everything has been reproduced correctly. — Note by the Disciple)

*

December 8

I: . . . I feel that I have achieved some mastery over the being. It did not happen in the past when I sat passively.

A.G.: It is possible to be a perfect instrument of God after the whole being is purified. Before that passivity can be harmful. The calm is a must.

*

January 4, 1926

I: I find that when I attempt to reject something it is as though I am pressing it downwards. Nowadays when I try to throw away the weakness that I find in the play, that goes on in my consciousness, I merely press it downwards.

A.G.: There should certainly be the pressure of the will from above, but you have to press it out of the being. Don't push it into the lower being — throw it out.

I: By 'throw out' I understand it is as though driving it out horizontally. But I feel that it is easier to press it down.

A.G.: If only that is done, it will remain. When it rises again, exert pressure and throw it out.

I: The play that goes on in the mental being seems to take place in front. At the back the mental Purusha keeps watch.

A.G.: You see the mental Purusha at the back? Not in front? The real Purusha will watch from above and, in calmness with the help of light and will, press on the impurities and throw them out.

I: Sometimes I experience that state. A positive calm descends from above and fills the mind and everything becomes luminous — these are rare experiences. On a few occasions just before I fell asleep, a current of force had come down from above,

and then I was afraid that perhaps the system would break down. The next moment when I awakened the 'I am Brahman' consciousness, the fear went away. And that force kept coming down. There was a stream of bright light in that column of force.

A.G.: (*He smiled on hearing that I was afraid.*) It happened in your sleep because your mind is still active. I don't say it to hurry you up. I'm not saying that it is bad. This kind of experience comes from time to time only in order to get the mind accustomed. If it comes down from above before the mind is thoroughly accustomed, then it results in the mind forming various wrong ideas.

I: The mind is not as active as it used to be earlier. . .

A.G.: Remain in the calmness above and pacify the mind with the will. Individual will is necessary to purify the *chitta* and the *prana*. Absolute passivity is a must for bringing down light, calmness and will in the physical being. Until that is attained individual will is necessary.

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original Bengali published in the journal *Srinvantu*, Vaishakh 1413, April-May 2006)



**FROM A LETTER PUBLISHED IN
THE STANDARD BEARER ON 22 NOVEMBER 1925**

. . . As you well know, I am identifying myself with only one kind of work or propaganda as regards India, the endeavour to reconstitute her cultural, social and economic life within larger and freer lines than the past on a spiritual basis.

(*Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, p. 279)



‘YOU HAVE THE WORD . . .’

Rabindranath Tagore on meeting Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry

For a long time I had a strong desire to meet Aurobindo Ghosh. It has just been fulfilled. I feel that I must write down the thoughts that have come to my mind.

In the Christian Scripture it has been said: — “In the beginning there was the Word.” The Word takes form in creation. It is not the calendar which introduces a new era. It is the Word, leading man to the path of a higher manifestation, a richer reality.

In the beginning and end of all great utterances in our scriptures we have the word Om. It has the meaning of self-acknowledgement of Truth, it is the breath of the Eternal.

From some great sea of idea, a tidal wave tumultuously broke upon Europe carrying on its crest the French Revolution. It was a new age, not because the oppressed of that time in France stood against their oppressors, but because that age had in its beginning the Word which spoke of a great moral liberation for all humanity.

Mazzini and Garibaldi ushered in a new age of awakening in Italy, not because of the external fact of a change in the political condition of that country, but because they gave utterance to the Word, which did not merely enjoin formal acts, but inspired an inner creative truth. The feeling of touch, with the help of which a man gathers in darkness things that are immediate to him, exclusively belongs to himself; but the sunlight represents the great touch of the universe; it is for the needs of every one, and it transcends the needs of all individuals. This light is the true symbol of the Word.

One day science introduced a new age to the Western world, not because she helped man to explore nature’s secrets, but because she revealed to him the universal aspect of reality in which all individual facts find their eternal background, because she aroused in him the loyalty to truth that could defy torture and death. Those who follow the modern development of science know that she has truly brought us to the threshold of another new age, when she takes us across things to the mystic shrine of light where sounds the original Word of Creation.

In ancient India, the age of creation began with the transition from ritual practices to spiritual wisdom. It sent its call to the soul, which creates from its own abundance; and men woke up and said, that only those truly live, who live in the bosom of the Eternal. This is the Word spoken from the heart of that age: “Those who realise Truth, realise immortality.”

In the Buddhist age, also, the Word came with the message of utmost sacrifice, of a love that is unlimited. It inspired an ideal of perfection in man’s moral nature, which busied itself in creating for him a world of emancipated will.

The Word is that which helps to bring forth towards manifestation the unmanifest

immense in man. Nature urges animals to restrict their endeavour in earning their daily wages of living. It is the Word which has rescued man from that enclosure of a narrow livelihood to a wider freedom of life. The dim fight in that world of physical self-preservation is for the world of night; and men are not nocturnal beings.

Time after time, man must discover new proofs to support the faith in his own greatness, the faith that gives him freedom in the Infinite. It is realised anew every time that we find a man whose soul is luminously seen through the translucent atmosphere of a perfect life. Not the one who has the strength of an intellect that reasons, a will that plans, the energy that works, but he whose life has become one with the Word, from whose being is breathed Om, the response of the everlasting yes.

The longing to meet such a person grows stronger when we find in men around us the self-mistrust which is spiritual nihilism, producing in them an indecent pride in asserting the paradox that man is to remain an incorrigible brute to the end of his days, that the value of our ideals must be judged by a standard which is that of the market price of things.

When, as today, truth is constantly being subordinated to purposes that have their sole meaning in a success hastily snatched up from a mad scramble for immediate opportunities our greed becomes uncontrollable. In its impatience it refuses to modulate its pace to the rhythm that is inherent in a normal process of achievement, and exploits all instruments of reckless speed, including propaganda of delusion. Ambition tries to curtail its own path, for its gain is at the end of that path, while truth is permeatingly one with the real seeking for her, as a flower with its stem. But, used as a vehicle of some utility, robbed of her love's wooing, she departs, leaving that semblance of utility a deception.

Ramachandra, the hero of the great epic Ramayana, during the long period of his wanderings in the wilderness, came to realise, helped by constant difficulties and dangers, the devotion of his wife Sita, his companion in exile. It was the best means of gaining her in truth through a strenuously intimate path of ever-ripening experience. After his return to his kingdom, urged by an immediate political necessity, he asked Sita to give an instant proof of her truth in a magic trial by fire before the suspicious multitude. Sita refused, knowing that such a trial could only offend truth by its callous unreality, and she disappeared for ever.

It brings to my mind the opening line of an old Bengali poem which my friend Kshitimohan Sen offered to me from his rich store of rare sayings. It may be translated thus:

*“O cruel man of urgent needs,
Must thou in thy haste scorch by fire the mind that is still in bud?”*

It takes time to prove the spirit of perfection lying in wait in a mind that is yet to mature. But a cruel urgency takes the quick means of a forced trial and the mind itself

disappears leaving the crowd to admire the gorgeousness of the preparation. When we find everywhere the hurry of this greed dragging truth tied to its chariot wheels along the dusty delusion of shortcuts, we feel sure that it would be futile to set against it a mere appeal of reason, but that a true man is needed who can maintain the patience of a profound faith against a constant temptation of urgency and hypnotism of a numerical magnitude.

We badly need today for the realisation of our human dignity a person who will preach respect for man in his completeness. It is a truism to say that man is *not* simple, that his personality consists of countless elements that are bewilderingly miscellaneous. It is possible to denude him of his wealth of being in order to reduce him to a bare simplicity that helps to fit him easily to a pattern of a parsimonious life. But it is important to remember that man *is* complex, and therefore his problems can only be solved by an adjustment, and not by any suppression of the varied in him or by narrowing the range of his development. By thinning it to an unmeaning repetition, eliminating from it the understanding mind and earnestness of devotion we can make our prayer simple and still simpler by bringing it down to a mechanical turning of the prayer wheel as they have done in Tibet. Such a process lightens the difficulty of a work by minimising the humanity of the worker. Teachers who are notoriously successful in guiding their pupils through examinations know that teaching can be made simple by cramming and hushing the questioning mind to sleep. It hastens success through a ruthless retrenchment of education. The present-day politics has become a menace to the world, because of its barbarous simplicity produced by the exclusion of the moral element from its method and composition. Industrialism also has its cult of an ascetic miserliness that simplifies its responsibility by ignoring the beautiful. On the other hand, the primitive methods of production attain their own simplicity through a barren negation of science and, to that extent, a poor expression of humanity. We recognise our true teacher when he comes not to lull us to a minimum vitality of spirit but to rouse us to the heroic fact that man's path of fulfilment is difficult, "*durgam pathastat*." Animals drifting on the surface of existence have their life that may be compared to a simple raft composed of banana trunks held together. But human life finds its symbol in a perfectly modelled boat which has its manifold system of oars, helm and sails, towing ropes and poles for the complex purpose of negotiating with the three elements of water, earth and air. For its construction it claims from science a principle of balance based upon countless observations and experiments, and from our instinct for art the decorations that are utterly beside the purpose with which they are associated. It gives expression to the intelligent mind which is carefully accurate in the difficult adjustment of various forces and materials and to the creative imagination that delights in the harmony of forms for its own sake. We should never be allowed to forget that spiritual perfection comprehends all the riches of life and gives them a great unity of meaning.

While my mind was occupied with such thoughts, the French steamer on which

I was travelling touched Pondicherry and I came to meet Aurobindo. At the very first sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through this long process of realisation has accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light and his serene presence made it evident to me that his soul was not crippled and cramped to the measure of some tyrannical doctrine, which takes delight in inflicting wounds upon life. He, I am sure, never had his lessons from the Christian monks of the ascetic Europe, revelling in the pride of that self-immolation which is a twin sister of self-aggrandisement joined back to back facing opposite directions.

I felt that the utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishi spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him, “You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world, ‘Hearken to me’.”

In her earlier forest home Sakuntala had her awakenment of life in the restlessness of her youth. In the later hermitage she attained the fulfilment of her life. Years ago I saw Aurobindo in the atmosphere of his earlier heroic youth and I sang to him,

“Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath.”

Today I saw him in a deeper atmosphere of a reticent richness of wisdom and again sang to him in silence,

“Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath.”

S. S. Chantilly, May 29, 1928.

(Reprinted from *The Modern Review*, July 1928)



DOING SOMETHING FOR THE WORLD

Muralidhar Devdas Amte (1914-2008), popularly known as Baba Amte devoted his life to the healing of leprosy patients.

Chamanlal Gupta describes his visit to Anandavan and a surprising discovery he made there.

Dr. Bisht, who was Director of JIPMER and later Director General of Health Services, New Delhi — (he passed away recently) — and always called himself Mother's medical attendant, was instrumental in bringing Baba Amte into my ken. Baba Amte has been a great worker for India's unity through his *Bharat Jodo Yatras* travelling from North to South and East to West across India. He is revered as a saint in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. His work in the field of leprosy-care is admired and has the same world-wide stature as Dr. Venkataswamy's in Eyecare. His *Anandavan* houses leprosy patients, who are given free treatment and rehabilitation, irrespective of caste, status or religion etc. and no one is ever refused, whatever be the situation. Once cured and rehabilitated, the patients are trained and engaged in useful occupations which bring enough revenue to meet all the running expenses. His sons, daughter, daughters-in-law and son-in-law have all dedicated themselves to this work along with the work of caring for adivasis and wildlife. Their centres are full of joy, work and beauty and innovation in the medical field, construction, energy, water conservation, fisheries, fruit and flower-culture, dairy-farming etc. Even the dead are not cremated but buried, and the *Anandavan* orchards grow on the land so that firewood is conserved and carbon is not added to the atmosphere. Everyone eats in the community kitchen including Baba Amte himself.

I went there in 1979 and stayed for four days during which time a solar water heater was made and plans were made for laying biogas plants — all of which have been worked out in the last 20 years with their own designs based on Herringbone brick-dome structure on large-size rectangular biogas digesters. The leakage is stopped by having water ponds on the top, and these are deep enough for fishing and for adventurous kids to cool off in the searing hot climate of Wardha.

It was during this visit that I discovered a saying of Sri Aurobindo that was new to me.

At the entrance of *Anandavan*, Baba Amte's leprosy rehabilitation home near Warora (between Wardha and Chandrapur), a quote from Sri Aurobindo is prominently visible. It states:

“If you want to do anything for the world, turn your back to it and it will fall at your feet.”

When I asked Baba Amte about the context, he said that when he had resigned

from the Mayorship of Warora and that H. V. Kamath had resigned from the ICS to serve the nation — (this was after the Simon Commission) — both of them thought that they would be applauded for their self-sacrifice. Instead, they were ridiculed and treated with scant respect, even by their friends.

They decided to come to the Ashram at Pondicherry and lay their problems before Sri Aurobindo who had successfully renounced politics and his intellectual work. This was in 1929. They sent their question to Sri Aurobindo.

And this had been His reply, presumably through the Mother or Nolini-da.

No mention of this seems to occur in any of the published literature.

Baba Amte told me that this has been his mantra, that which kept him on the path of service. He also said that he constantly remembers it so that his head and heart remain in the right place and success and adulation from the world do not lead him astray.

He said this with such a visible feeling of gratitude even after fifty years!



MAURICE SCHUMANN RECOLLECTS

Maurice Schumann (1911-1988) was a French politician and writer who was the inspirational radio spokesman of Gen. Charles de Gaulle and the French Resistance in broadcasts to Nazi-ruled France from London during World War II; he later served as a political party leader, foreign minister. He became a member of the French Academy.

In this interview with Pournaprema he recollects his coming to work out the modalities of the transfer of the French controlled territories to independent India.

He met Sri Aurobindo — and it was that, he says, that ensured the success of his mission.

... So the question was to find out if there was a way to negotiate with the Government of India, not the perpetuation of our presence in the five enclaves, but a delay, a time for reflection which would enable later negotiations to enable these enclaves to attain independence.

At first, when I was sent to try to obtain this result, I was told, the diplomats explained to me that the chances were very, very meagre, not to say nil, given the fact that India in its entirety, at the time when she was torn by civil strife — which I personally witnessed and which made so much blood to flow, (mainly in Calcutta,

and where 'Mother India', as Gandhi used to say, was broken in two by the birth of Pakistan, which at the time was a Pakistan itself split in two, as there was an East Pakistan and as Pakistan,) it seemed inconceivable that a continuation of a French or Portuguese colony was possible.

François Baron told me then that there was a strong French influence in the Ashram.

[. . .]

. . . She [The Mother] arranged a meeting with Sri Aurobindo which was all the more surprising because as a rule Sri Aurobindo was not seeing anybody. . . He made an exception for me. Given the stature he had, his immense moral influence, it was in itself an event. And from the moment he received me on this earth that his presence sanctified, the idea of use of force against a place where he had, pursued by the British police, taken refuge, was inconceivable. He had an opportunity to express his gratefulness to France, he did it immediately and the interview he gave me, the audience he granted me, went even further. Actually, it is an important phenomenon that I have understood better since, that the colonisers of India, their more important figures, had the feeling, to use Kipling's phrase, that never would the East and the West meet.

[. . .]

Whereas the greatest Indians held the absolutely opposite opinion. That was the case with Gandhi when I met him. I met him after I met Sri Aurobindo. I went to Delhi and it is there that I met him. But Gandhi was fully aware of what he owed to English culture. And Sri Aurobindo was fully aware of what he owed to Western culture.

[. . .]

The political result, I have just spoken to you about it: I was received by Nehru, it could not have been otherwise after having been received by Sri Aurobindo, who had permitted that a report of it could be made, and so he [Nehru] could not but receive me, Gandhi could not but receive me, and both of them had to discuss with me, — mainly Nehru, for Gandhi had other concerns — the future of the decolonisation of the five enclaves, to discuss but not to think even for a moment, to take recourse to arms. That was then the success of my first diplomatic negotiation. I am not able to say the same for the others I had later as Minister for Foreign Affairs.

[. . .]

And do you think that, at present, if there is this French presence in Pondicherry, — for there are important French institutions in Pondicherry, — it is due to this.

It all started with that. For it was not possible to hold on to a colonial status. There was a deputy from French India who was an Indian, Saravan Lambert, in the National Assembly, my colleague; there was a Senator representing French India, — it was already the situation before the war and so it continued during the Fourth Republic, but we could not be happy with a colonial status as in the earlier days. Therefore we created, within what was then known as the French Union, a body consisting of the representatives of the five enclaves. The first meeting was held in Pondicherry. I was present. I spoke to the delegates, and there an idea came up, which was immediately developed further. It was this:

We salute Independent India. We know perfectly well that the whole of India will one day be independent. We would like that the departure of France as a power and as an authority should coincide with an agreement regarding Pondicherry which would become a window open to France, to the whole French entity, French culture and the French language.

A half-century later, there are definite signs for which I am infinitely grateful to Sri Aurobindo and to your grandmother [The Mother], for it is evident that without her the first stone of the edifice would not have been placed.

It is wonderful to hear that. I thank you very much.

[. . .]

After all these years, what do you still recollect of your meeting with Sri Aurobindo? An inner impression . . .

The extraordinary radiance of the divine life, the Life Divine. The radiance that was there on his face. I always thought that faith manifested as a breath. One feels, in certain circumstances, the Breath of God, *Spiritus* — it means ‘breath’ . . . and felt it as soon as I saw him. One had the impression — there was no artificial light falling on him — one had the impression that he was himself a radiant centre.

How long did the interview last?

One hour. It was more philosophic than political, but its political importance was that it did take place. The single fact that it happened guaranteed the success of my mission.

And Mother, where did you meet her?

In the room where Sri Aurobindo meditated. It is because of her that the interview took place. The idea came from François Baron who was himself an adept of Sri Aurobindo whom he called ‘My Master’.

(Translation of a transcript of an interview in French.)



K. M. MUNSHI'S MEETING WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Kanhaiyalal Maneklal Munshi (1887-1971) was a student of Sri Aurobindo at Baroda College.

He took an active part in the Indian Independence Movement. An eminent politician, a well-loved writer and educationist, he founded in 1938 the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, an organisation he described as ‘an adventure of faith in India’s past, present and future’ as well as in ‘its people and the rich and unbroken cultural heritage’ of India.

Then the Mahayogi sprang a surprise on me: “When do you expect India to be united?” he asked.

I was taken aback. I explained to him how our leaders had agreed to partition.

I then said: “So long as the present generation of politicians is concerned, I cannot think of any time when the two countries — India and Pakistan — can be united.”

Sri Aurobindo smiled and answered: “India will be reunited. I see it clearly.”

Was it an opinion? Was it a clear perception?

I shook my head in doubt and asked how India could be reunited. In two short sentences the god-man described what Pakistan stood for, and indicated how the two countries could come together.

“Pakistan has been created by falsehood, fraud and force. It must be brought under India’s military ambit.”¹

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1. As quoted in *A Vision of United India* by Kittu Reddy, published by Standard Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, p. 215.

. . . He saw into the heart of things. In July 1950, for over twenty minutes he spoke to me on contemporary affairs with a thorough grasp of what was happening in the world. His perception of the political situation in India was always unerring.

[. . .]

. . . Last year he talked to me of India and Pakistan. In a prophetic vein he said, "They will be united". I respectfully demurred. He added, "Pakistan must be brought within the ambit". Yes, of cooperation and allied strength. But when?²

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(From a talk on the radio, December 5, 1950)

Five months ago I saw him in radiant health and listened to the words of wisdom which fell from his lips. A few days ago he gave *darshan* to his disciples. We looked forward to celebrating his 80th birthday in August 1951. Suddenly he has been called away. Motherland has lost one of the noblest of her sons.

[. . .]

. . . And when I met him in July last, I saw in him not my old professor but something different. It was absolute integration of personality; attachment, wrath and fear in him had been transmuted into a power which was at the same time beautiful and calm, the Central Idea in Aryan culture materialised in human shape. He seemed to say in his own language:

My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight
 My body is God's happy living tool,
 My spirit a vast sun of deathless light.

The sudden death of so great a master naturally leaves a great void. But his task on earth was done. He lived and has his being in Divine Consciousness as did the Great Masters of old and his shuffling off the mortal coil cannot interfere with the spiritual influence which through calmness exquisite he radiates and will continue to radiate in spirit.

And so long as the spirit of such Masters living in God walks on the earth, we need not despair of the destiny of man to rise to the dignity of a god.³

2. From K. M. Munshi's article 'Sri Aurobindo' in *The Advent*, November 1951, pp. 304-05.

3. *Sparks from an Anvil* by K. M. Munshi, published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1951, pp. 40-44.