

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXII

No. 9

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

THE INNER FIELDS (Poem)	...	719
REASON AND RELIGION	...	720
THE SECRET GOAL OF OUR HUMAN NATURE	...	725
‘THE KINGDOM IS OF THE CHILD’	...	729
TO SEEK TRUTH FOR ITS OWN SAKE	...	730

The Mother

‘PEACE, PEACE UPON ALL THE EARTH!’	...	731
THE STEPS OF THE SOUL	...	732
THE MOTHER SPEAKS ABOUT ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL	...	735
A BUDDHIST STORY	...	741

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

“BIRDS IN THE NIGHT” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO	...	743
--	-----	-----

P. B. Saint Hilaire (Pavitra)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY		
CHAPTER FOUR: NEW PROJECTS (Continued)	...	745
ADDENDUM 1: PANURGE AND PANTAGRUEL ON MARRIAGE (from François Rabelais)	...	754
ADDENDUM 2: A NOTE ON THE JAPANESE EARTHQUAKE OF 1923 (from the Internet)	...	758

Arun Chatterjee

GOD AND THE WORLD IN JEWISH MYSTICISM, HINDUISM AND SRI AUROBINDO’S PHILOSOPHY	...	760
---	-----	-----

Motilal Roy

YUGAPURUSH SRI AUROBINDO	...	771
--------------------------	-----	-----

Felicity

A PRINCE IN THE ASHRAM	...	776
------------------------	-----	-----

<i>Sumitra Nahar</i>		
PRITHWI SINGH AND THE PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT	...	780
ADDENDUM: SRI AUROBINDO'S NOTES ON CERTAIN ENGLISH TERMS OCCURRING IN HIS WORKS	...	784
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY		
11. THE FLOWER THAT MOTHER GIVES	...	786
ADDENDUM: A LETTER TO A FRIEND	...	794
<i>Aster Patel</i>		
AS THE WORLD RE-SHAPES ITSELF.	795
<i>Maggi</i>		
A BOOK FOR CHILDREN OF 3 TO 103	...	798

CORRECTION

An alert reader has brought to our attention two slips in the August issue. In the last sentence of the first paragraph on page 629, the word should have been 'ought' and not 'aught'.

In the third sentence of the second paragraph on page 706, the word should have been spelt 'demurred' and not 'demured'.

THE INNER FIELDS

There is a brighter ether than this blue
 Pretence of an enveloping heavenly vault,
 A deeper greenness than this laughing assault¹
Of emerald rapture pearled with tears of dew.
Immortal spaces of cerulean hue
 Are in our reach and fields without this fault
 Of drab brown earth and streams that never halt
In their deep murmur which white flowers strew

Floating like stars upon a strip of sky.
 This world behind is made of truer stuff
 Than the manufactured tissue of earth's grace.
There we can walk and see the gods go by
 And sip from Hebe's cup nectar enough
 To make for us heavenly limbs and deathless face.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 158)

1. Royaler investiture than this massed assault

REASON AND RELIGION

THE limitations of the reason become very strikingly, very characteristically, very nakedly apparent when it is confronted with that great order of psychological truths and experiences which we have hitherto kept in the background — the religious being of man and his religious life. Here is a realm at which the intellectual reason gazes with the bewildered mind of a foreigner who hears a language of which the words and the spirit are unintelligible to him and sees everywhere forms of life and principles of thought and action which are absolutely strange to his experience. He may try to learn this speech and understand this strange and alien life; but it is with pain and difficulty, and he cannot succeed unless he has, so to speak, unlearned himself and become one in spirit and nature with the natives of this celestial empire. Till then his efforts to understand and interpret them in his own language and according to his own notions end at the worst in a gross misunderstanding and deformation. The attempts of the positive critical reason to dissect the phenomena of the religious life sound to men of spiritual experience like the prattle of a child who is trying to shape into the mould of his own habitual notions the life of adults or the blunders of an ignorant mind which thinks fit to criticise patronisingly or adversely the labours of a profound thinker or a great scientist. At the best even this futile labour can extract, can account for only the externals of the things it attempts to explain; the spirit is missed, the inner matter is left out, and as a result of that capital omission even the account of the externals is left without real truth and has only an apparent correctness.

The unaided intellectual reason faced with the phenomena of the religious life is naturally apt to adopt one of two attitudes, both of them shallow in the extreme, hastily presumptuous and erroneous. Either it views the whole thing as a mass of superstition, a mystical nonsense, a farrago of ignorant barbaric survivals, — that was the extreme spirit of the rationalist now happily, though not dead, yet much weakened and almost moribund, — or it patronises religion, tries to explain its origins, to get rid of it by the process of explaining it away; or it labours gently or forcefully to reject or correct its superstitions, crudities, absurdities, to purify it into an abstract nothingness or persuade it to purify itself in the light of the reasoning intelligence; or it allows it a role, leaves it perhaps for the edification of the ignorant, admits its value as a moralising influence or its utility to the State for keeping the lower classes in order, even perhaps tries to invent that strange chimera, a rational religion.

The former attitude has on its positive side played a powerful part in the history of human thought, has even been of a considerable utility in its own way — we shall have to note briefly hereafter how and why — to human progress and in the end even to religion; but its intolerant negations are an arrogant falsity, as the human mind has

now sufficiently begun to perceive. Its mistake is like that of a foreigner who thinks everything in an alien country absurd and inferior because these things are not his own ways of acting and thinking and cannot be cut out by his own measures or suited to his own standards. So the thoroughgoing rationalist asks the religious spirit, if it is to stand, to satisfy the material reason and even to give physical proof of its truths, while the very essence of religion is the discovery of the immaterial Spirit and the play of a supraphysical consciousness. So too he tries to judge religion by his idea of its externalities, just as an ignorant and obstreperous foreigner might try to judge a civilisation by the dress, outward colour of life and some of the most external peculiarities in the social manners of the inhabitants. That in this he errs in company with certain of the so-called religious themselves, may be his excuse, but cannot be the justification of his ignorance. The more moderate attitude of the rational mind has also played its part in the history of human thought. Its attempts to explain religion have resulted in the compilation of an immense mass of amazingly ingenious perversions, such as certain pseudo-scientific attempts to form a comparative Science of Religion. It has built up in the approved modern style immense façades of theory with stray bricks of misunderstood facts for their material. Its mild condonations of religion have led to superficial phases of thought which have passed quickly away and left no trace behind them. Its efforts at the creation of a rational religion, perfectly well-intentioned, but helpless and unconvincing, have had no appreciable effect and have failed like a dispersing cloud, *chinnābhram iva naśyati*.

The deepest heart, the inmost essence of religion, apart from its outward machinery of creed, cult, ceremony and symbol, is the search for God and the finding of God. Its aspiration is to discover the Infinite, the Absolute, the One, the Divine, who is all these things and yet no abstraction but a Being. Its work is a sincere living out of the true and intimate relations between man and God, relations of unity, relations of difference, relations of an illuminated knowledge, an ecstatic love and delight, an absolute surrender and service, a casting of every part of our existence out of its normal status into an uprush of man towards the Divine and a descent of the Divine into man. All this has nothing to do with the realm of reason or its normal activities; its aim, its sphere, its process is suprarational. The knowledge of God is not to be gained by weighing the feeble arguments of reason for or against his existence: it is to be gained only by a self-transcending and absolute consecration, aspiration and experience. Nor does that experience proceed by anything like rational scientific experiment or rational philosophic thinking. Even in those parts of religious discipline which seem most to resemble scientific experiment, the method is a verification of things which exceed the reason and its timid scope. Even in those parts of religious knowledge which seem most to resemble intellectual operations, the illuminating faculties are not imagination, logic and rational judgment, but revelations, inspirations, intuitions, intuitive discernments that leap down to us from a plane of suprarational light. The love of God is an infinite and absolute feeling which does not admit of any

rational limitation and does not use a language of rational worship and adoration; the delight in God is that peace and bliss which passes all understanding. The surrender to God is the surrender of the whole being to a suprarational light, will, power and love and his service takes no account of the compromises with life which the practical reason of man uses as the best part of its method in the ordinary conduct of mundane existence. Wherever religion really finds itself, wherever it opens itself to its own spirit, — there is plenty of that sort of religious practice which is halting, imperfect, half-sincere, only half-sure of itself and in which reason can get in a word, — its way is absolute and its fruits are ineffable.

Reason has indeed a part to play in relation to this highest field of our religious being and experience, but that part is quite secondary and subordinate. It cannot lay down the law for the religious life, it cannot determine in its own right the system of divine knowledge; it cannot school and lesson the divine love and delight; it cannot set bounds to spiritual experience or lay its yoke upon the action of the spiritual man. Its sole legitimate sphere is to explain as best it can, in its own language and to the rational and intellectual parts of man, the truths, the experiences, the laws of our suprarational and spiritual existence. That has been the work of spiritual philosophy in the East and — much more crudely and imperfectly done — of theology in the West, a work of great importance at moments like the present when the intellect of mankind after a long wandering is again turning towards the search for the Divine. Here there must inevitably enter a part of those operations proper to the intellect, logical reasoning, inferences from the data given by rational experience, analogies drawn from our knowledge of the apparent facts of existence, appeals even to the physical truths of science, all the apparatus of the intelligent mind in its ordinary workings. But this is the weakest part of spiritual philosophy. It convinces the rational mind only where the intellect is already predisposed to belief, and even if it convinces, it cannot give the true knowledge. Reason is safest when it is content to take the profound truths and experiences of the spiritual being and the spiritual life, just as they are given to it, and throw them into such form, order and language as will make them the most intelligible or the least unintelligible to the reasoning mind. Even then it is not quite safe, for it is apt to harden the order into an intellectual system and to present the form as if it were the essence. And, at best, it has to use a language which is not the very tongue of the suprarational truth but its inadequate translation and, since it is not the ordinary tongue either of the rational intelligence, it is open to non-understanding or misunderstanding by the ordinary reason of mankind. It is well-known to the experience of the spiritual seeker that even the highest philosophising cannot give a true inner knowledge, is not the spiritual light, does not open the gates of experience. All it can do is to address the consciousness of man through his intellect and, when it has done, to say, "I have tried to give you the truth in a form and system which will make it intelligible and possible to you; if you are intellectually convinced or attracted, you can now seek the real knowledge, but you must seek it by other

means which are beyond my province.”

But there is another level of the religious life in which reason might seem justified in interfering more independently and entitled to assume a superior role. For as there is the suprarational life in which religious aspiration finds entirely what it seeks, so too there is also the infrarational life of the instincts, impulses, sensations, crude emotions, vital activities from which all human aspiration takes its beginning. These too feel the touch of the religious sense in man, share its needs and experience, desire its satisfactions. Religion includes this satisfaction also in its scope, and in what is usually called religion it seems even to be the greater part, sometimes to an external view almost the whole; for the supreme purity of spiritual experience does not appear or is glimpsed only through this mixed and turbid current. Much impurity, ignorance, superstition, many doubtful elements must form as the result of this contact and union of our highest tendencies with our lower ignorant nature. Here it would seem that reason has its legitimate part; here surely it can intervene to enlighten, purify, rationalise the play of the instincts and impulses. It would seem that a religious reformation, a movement to substitute a “pure” and rational religion for one that is largely infrarational and impure, would be a distinct advance in the religious development of humanity. To a certain extent this may be, but, owing to the peculiar nature of the religious being, its entire urge towards the suprarational, not without serious qualifications, nor can the rational mind do anything here that is of a high positive value.

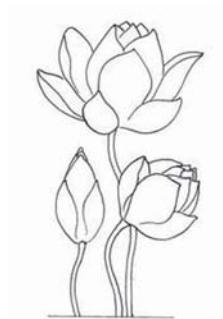
Religious forms and systems become effete and corrupt and have to be destroyed, or they lose much of their inner sense and become clouded in knowledge and injurious in practice, and in destroying what is effete or in negating aberrations reason has played an important part in religious history. But in its endeavour to get rid of the superstition and ignorance which have attached themselves to religious forms and symbols, intellectual reason unenlightened by spiritual knowledge tends to deny and, so far as it can, to destroy the truth and the experience which was contained in them. Reformations which give too much to reason and are too negative and protestant, usually create religions which lack in wealth of spirituality and fullness of religious emotion; they are not opulent in their contents; their form and too often their spirit is impoverished, bare and cold. Nor are they really rational; for they live not by their reasoning and dogma, which to the rational mind is as irrational as that of the creeds they replace, still less by their negations, but by their positive quantum of faith and fervour which is suprarational in its whole aim and has too its infrarational elements. If these seem less gross to the ordinary mind than those of less self-questioning creeds, it is often because they are more timid in venturing into the realm of suprarational experience. The life of the instincts and impulses on its religious side cannot be satisfyingly purified by reason, but rather by being sublimated, by being lifted up into the illuminations of the spirit. The natural line of religious development proceeds always by illumination; and religious reformation acts best when either it reilluminates rather than destroys old forms or, where destruction is necessary, replaces them by

richer and not by poorer forms, and in any case when it purifies by suprarational illumination, not by rational enlightenment. A purely rational religion could only be a cold and bare Deism, and such attempts have always failed to achieve vitality and permanence; for they act contrary to the *dharmā*, the natural law and spirit of religion. If reason is to play any decisive part, it must be an intuitive rather than an intellectual reason, touched always by spiritual intensity and insight. For it must be remembered that the infrarational also has behind it a secret Truth which does not fall within the domain of the Reason and is not wholly amenable to its judgments. The heart has its knowledge, the life has its intuitive spirit within it, its intimations, divinations, outbreaks and upflamings of a Secret Energy, a divine or at least semi-divine aspiration and outreaching which the eye of intuition alone can fathom and only intuitive speech or symbol can shape or utter. To root out these things from religion or to purge religion of any elements necessary for its completeness because the forms are defective or obscure, without having the power to illuminate them from within or the patience to wait for their illumination from above or without replacing them by more luminous symbols, is not to purify but to pauperise.

But the relations of the spirit and the reason need not be, as they too often are in our practice, hostile or without any point of contact. Religion itself need not adopt for its principle the formula "I believe because it is impossible" or Pascal's "I believe because it is absurd." What is impossible or absurd to the unaided reason, becomes real and right to the reason lifted beyond itself by the power of the spirit and irradiated by its light. For then it is dominated by the intuitive mind which is our means of passage to a yet higher principle of knowledge. The widest spirituality does not exclude or discourage any essential human activity or faculty, but works rather to lift all of them up out of their imperfection and groping ignorance, transforms them by its touch and makes them the instruments of the light, power and joy of the divine being and the divine nature.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 129-35)



THE SECRET GOAL OF OUR HUMAN NATURE

... THE higher knowledge we then get is that which is to the knower of Brahman his constant vision of things when he lives uninterruptedly in the Brahman, *brahmavid brahmaṇi sthitaḥ*. That is not a vision or knowledge or consciousness of Brahman to the exclusion of all else, but a seeing of all in Brahman and as the Self. For, it is said, the knowledge by which we rise beyond all relapse back into the bewilderment of our mental nature, is “that by which thou shalt see all existences without exception in the Self, then in Me.” Elsewhere the Gita puts it more largely, “Equal-visioned everywhere, he sees the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self. He who sees Me everywhere and all and each in Me, is never lost to Me nor I to him. He who has reached oneness and loves Me in all beings, that Yogin, howsoever he lives and acts, is living and acting in Me. O Arjuna, he who sees all equally everywhere as himself, whether it be happiness or suffering, I hold him to be the supreme Yogin.” That is the old Vedantic knowledge of the Upanishads which the Gita holds up constantly before us; but it is its superiority to other later formulations of it that it turns persistently this knowledge into a great practical philosophy of divine living. Always it insists on the relation between this knowledge of oneness and Karmayoga, and therefore on the knowledge of oneness as the basis of a liberated action in the world. Whenever it speaks of knowledge, it turns at once to speak of equality which is its result; whenever it speaks of equality, it turns to speak too of the knowledge which is its basis. The equality it enjoins does not begin and end in a static condition of the soul useful only for self-liberation; it is always a basis of works. The peace of the Brahman in the liberated soul is the foundation; the large, free, equal, world-wide action of the Lord in the liberated nature radiates the power which proceeds from that peace; these two made one synthesise divine works and God-knowledge.

We see at once what a profound extension we get here for the ideas which otherwise the Gita has in common with other systems of philosophic, ethical or religious living. Endurance, philosophic indifference, resignation are, we have said, the foundation of three kinds of equality; but the Gita’s truth of knowledge not only gathers them all up together, but gives them an infinitely profound, a magnificently ample significance. The Stoic knowledge is that of the soul’s power of self-mastery by fortitude, an equality attained by a struggle with one’s nature, maintained by a constant vigilance and control against its natural rebellions: it gives a noble peace, an austere happiness, but not the supreme joy of the liberated self living not by a rule, but in the pure, easy, spontaneous perfection of its divine being, so that “however it may act and live, it acts and lives in the Divine,” because here perfection is not only attained but possessed in its own right and has no longer to be maintained by effort, for it has become the very nature of the soul’s being. The Gita accepts the endurance

and fortitude of our struggle with the lower nature as a preliminary movement; but if a certain mastery comes by our individual strength, the freedom of mastery only comes by our union with God, by a merging or dwelling of the personality in the one divine Person and the loss of the personal will in the divine Will. There is a divine Master of Nature and her works, above her though inhabiting her, who is our highest being and our universal self; to be one with him is to make ourselves divine. By union with God we enter into a supreme freedom and a supreme mastery. The ideal of the Stoic, the sage who is king because by self-rule he becomes master also of outward conditions, resembles superficially the Vedantic idea of the self-ruler and all-ruler, *svarāṭ samrāṭ*; but it is on a lower plane. The Stoic kingship is maintained by a force put upon self and environment; the entirely liberated kingship of the Yogin exists naturally by the eternal royalty of the divine nature, a union with its unfettered universality, a finally unforced dwelling in its superiority to the instrumental nature through which it acts. His mastery over things is because he has become one soul with all things. To take an image from Roman institutions, the Stoic freedom is that of the *libertus*, the freedman, who is still really a dependent on the power that once held him enslaved; his is a freedom allowed by Nature because he has merited it. The freedom of the Gita is that of the freeman, the true freedom of the birth into the higher nature, self-existent in its divinity. Whatever he does and however he lives, the free soul lives in the Divine; he is the privileged child of the mansion, *bālavat*, who cannot err or fall because all he is and does is full of the Perfect, the All-blissful, the All-loving, the All-beautiful. The kingdom which he enjoys, *rājyam samṛddham*, is a sweet and happy dominion of which it may be said, in the pregnant phrase of the Greek thinker, “The kingdom is of the child.”

The knowledge of the philosopher is that of the true nature of mundane existence, the transience of outward things, the vanity of the world’s differences and distinctions, the superiority of the inner calm, peace, light, self-dependence. It is an equality of philosophic indifference; it brings a high calm, but not the greater spiritual joy; it is an isolated freedom, a wisdom like that of the Lucretian sage high in his superiority upon the cliff-top whence he looks down on men tossed still upon the tempestuous waters from which he has escaped, — in the end something after all aloof and ineffective. The Gita admits the philosophic motive of indifference as a preliminary movement; but the indifference to which it finally arrives, if indeed that inadequate word can be at all applied, has nothing in it of the philosophic aloofness. It is indeed a position as of one seated above, *udāsīnavat*, but as the Divine is seated above, having no need at all in the world, yet he does works always and is present everywhere supporting, helping, guiding the labour of creatures. This equality is founded upon oneness with all beings. It brings in what is wanting to the philosophic equality; for its soul is the soul of peace, but also it is the soul of love. It sees all beings without exception in the Divine, it is one self with the Self of all existences and therefore it is in supreme sympathy with all of them. Without exception, *aśeṣeṇa*, not only with

all that is good and fair and pleases; nothing and no one, however vile, fallen, criminal, repellent in appearance, can be excluded from this universal, this whole-souled sympathy and spiritual oneness. Here there is no room, not merely for hatred or anger or uncharitableness, but for aloofness, disdain or any petty pride of superiority. A divine compassion for the ignorance of the struggling mind, a divine will to pour forth on it all light and power and happiness there will be, indeed, for the apparent man; but for the divine Soul within him there will be more, there will be adoration and love. For from all, from the thief and the harlot and the outcaste as from the saint and the sage, the Beloved looks forth and cries to us, "This is I." "He who loves Me in all beings," — what greater word of power for the utmost intensities and profundities of divine and universal love, has been uttered by any philosophy or any religion?

Resignation is the basis of a kind of religious equality, submission to the divine will, a patient bearing of the cross, a submissive forbearance. In the Gita this element takes the more ample form of an entire surrender of the whole being to God. It is not merely a passive submission, but an active self-giving; not only a seeing and an accepting of the divine Will in all things, but a giving up of one's own will to be the instrument of the Master of works, and this not with the lesser idea of being a servant of God, but, eventually at least, of such a complete renunciation both of the consciousness and the works to him that our being becomes one with his being and the impersonalised nature only an instrument and nothing else. All result good or bad, pleasing or unpleasing, fortunate or unfortunate, is accepted as belonging to the Master of our actions, so that finally not only are grief and suffering borne, but they are banished: a perfect equality of the emotional mind is established. There is no assumption of personal will in the instrument; it is seen that all is already worked out in the omniscient prescience and omnipotent effective power of the universal Divine and that the egoism of men cannot alter the workings of that Will. Therefore, the final attitude is that enjoined on Arjuna in a later chapter, "All has been already done by Me in my divine will and foresight; become only the occasion, O Arjuna," *nimitta-mātram bhava savyasācin*. This attitude must lead finally to an absolute union of the personal with the Divine Will and, with the growth of knowledge, bring about a faultless response of the instrument to the divine Power and Knowledge. A perfect, an absolute equality of self-surrender, the mentality a passive channel of the divine Light and Power, the active being a mightily effective instrument for its work in the world, will be the poise of this supreme union of the Transcendent, the universal and the individual.

Equality too there will be with regard to the action of others upon us. Nothing that they can do will alter the inner oneness, love, sympathy which arises from the perception of the one Self in all, the Divine in all beings. But a resigned forbearance and submission to them and their deeds, a passive non-resistance, will be no necessary part of the action; it cannot be, since a constant instrumental obedience to the divine and universal Will must mean in the shock of opposite forces that fill the world a

conflict with personal wills which seek rather their own egoistic satisfaction. Therefore Arjuna is bidden to resist, to fight, to conquer; but, to fight without hatred or personal desire or personal enmity or antagonism, since to the liberated soul these feelings are impossible. To act for the *lokasaṅgraha*, impersonally, for the keeping and leading of the peoples on the path to the divine goal, is a rule which rises necessarily from the oneness of the soul with the Divine, the universal Being, since that is the whole sense and drift of the universal action. Nor does it conflict with our oneness with all beings, even those who present themselves here as opponents and enemies. For the divine goal is their goal also, since it is the secret aim of all, even of those whose outward minds, misled by ignorance and egoism, would wander from the path and resist the impulsion. Resistance and defeat are the best outward service that can be done to them. By this perception the Gita avoids the limiting conclusion which might have been drawn from a doctrine of equality impracticably overriding all relations and of a weakening love without knowledge, while it keeps the one thing essential unimpaired. For the soul oneness with all, for the heart calm universal love, sympathy, compassion, but for the hands freedom to work out impersonally the good, not of this or that person only without regard to or to the detriment of the divine plan, but the purpose of the creation, the progressing welfare and salvation of men, the total good of all existences.

Oneness with God, oneness with all beings, the realisation of the eternal divine unity everywhere and the drawing onwards of men towards that oneness are the law of life which arises from the teachings of the Gita. There can be none greater, wider, more profound. Liberated oneself, to live in this oneness, to help mankind on the path that leads towards it and meanwhile to do all works for God and help man also to do with joy and acceptance all the works to which he is called, *kṛtsna-karma-kṛt*, *sarvakarmāṇi joṣayan*, no greater or more liberal rule of divine works can be given. This freedom and this oneness are the secret goal of our human nature and the ultimate will in the existence of the race. It is that to which it must turn for the happiness all mankind is now vainly seeking, when once men lift their eyes and their hearts to see the Divine in them and around, in all and everywhere, *sarveṣu*, *sarvatra*, and learn that it is in him they live, while this lower nature of division is only a prison-wall which they must break down or at best an infant-school which they must outgrow, so that they may become adult in nature and free in spirit. To be made one self with God above and God in man and God in the world is the sense of liberation and the secret of perfection.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, pp. 205-11)

‘THE KINGDOM IS OF THE CHILD’

DOES the thought of Heraclitus admit of any such hope as the Vedic seers held and hymned with so triumphant a confidence? or does it even give ground for any aspiration to some kind of a divine supermanhood such as his disciples the Stoics so sternly laboured for or as that of which Nietzsche, the modern Heraclitus, drew a too crude and violent figure? His saying that man is kindled and extinguished as light disappears into night, is commonplace and discouraging enough. But this may after all be only true of the apparent man. Is it possible for man in his becoming to raise his present fixed measures? to elevate his mental, relative, individual reason into direct communion with or direct participation in the divine and absolute reason? to inspire and raise the values of his human force to the higher values of the divine force? to become aware like the gods of an absolute good and an absolute beauty? to lift this mortal to the nature of immortality? Against his melancholy image of human transiency we have that remarkable and cryptic sentence, “the gods are mortals, men immortals”, which, taken literally, might mean that the gods are powers that perish and replace each other and the soul of man alone is immortal, but must at least mean that there is in man behind his outward transiency an immortal spirit. We have too his saying, “thou canst not find the limits of the soul”, and we have the profoundest of all Heraclitus’ utterances, “the kingdom is of the child.” If man is in his real being an infinite and immortal spirit, there is surely no reason why he should not awaken to his immortality, arise towards the consciousness of the universal, one and absolute, live in a higher self-realisation. “I have sought for myself” says Heraclitus; and what was it that he found?

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 251-52)

TO SEEK TRUTH FOR ITS OWN SAKE

No doubt, in seeking Truth we must seek it for its own sake first and not start with any preconceived practical aim and prepossession which would distort our disinterested view of things; but when Truth has been found, its bearing on life becomes of capital importance and is the solid justification of the labour spent in our research. Indian philosophy has always understood its double function; it has sought the Truth not only as an intellectual pleasure or the natural dharma of the reason, but in order to know how man may live by the Truth or strive after it; hence its intimate influence on the religion, the social ideas, the daily life of the people, its immense dynamic power on the mind and actions of Indian humanity. The Greek thinkers, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, the Stoics and Epicureans, had also this practical aim and dynamic force, but it acted only on the cultured few. That was because Greek philosophy, losing its ancient affiliation to the Mystics, separated itself from the popular religion; but as ordinarily Philosophy alone can give light to Religion and save it from crudeness, ignorance and superstition, so Religion alone can give, except for a few, spiritual passion and effective power to Philosophy and save it from becoming unsubstantial, abstract and sterile. It is a misfortune for both when the divine sisters part company.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 244-45)

‘PEACE, PEACE UPON ALL THE EARTH!’

February 14, 1914

PEACE, peace upon all the earth!

May all escape from the ordinary consciousness and be delivered from the attachment for material things; may they awake to the knowledge of Thy divine presence, unite themselves with Thy supreme consciousness and taste the plenitude of peace that springs from it.

Lord, Thou art the sovereign Master of our being. Thy law is our law, and with all our strength we aspire to identify our consciousness with Thy eternal consciousness, that we may accomplish Thy sublime work in each thing and at every moment.

Lord, deliver us from all care for contingencies, deliver us from the ordinary outlook on things. Grant that we may henceforth see only with Thy eyes and act only by Thy will. Transform us into living torches of Thy divine love.

With reverence, with devotion, in a joyful consecration of my whole being I give myself, O Lord, to the fulfilment of Thy law.

Peace, peace upon all the earth!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 74)

THE STEPS OF THE SOUL

THE human individual is a very complex being: he is composed of innumerable elements, each one of which is an independent entity and has almost a personality. Not only so, the most contradictory elements are housed together. If there is a particular quality or capacity present, the very opposite of it, annulling it, as it were, will also be found along with it and embracing it. I have seen a man brave, courageous, heroic to the extreme, flinching from no danger, facing unperturbed the utmost peril, truly the bravest of the brave; and yet I have seen the same man cowering in abject terror, like the last of poltroons, in the presence of certain circumstances. I have seen a most generous man giving things away largely, freely, not counting any expenditure or sacrifice, without the least care or reservation; the same person I have also found to be the vilest of misers with respect to certain other considerations. Again, I have seen the most intelligent person, with a clear mind, full of light and understanding, easily comprehending the logic and implication of a topic; and yet I have seen him betraying the utmost stupidity of which even an ordinary man without education or intelligence would be incapable. These are not theoretical examples: I have come across such persons actually in life.

The complexity arises not only in extension but also in depth. Man does not live on a single plane but on many planes at the same time. There is a scale of gradation in human consciousness: the higher one rises in the scale the greater the number of elements or personalities that one possesses. Whether one lives mostly or mainly on the physical or vital or mental plane or on any particular section of these planes or on the planes above and beyond them, there will be, accordingly, differences in the constitution or psycho-physical make-up of the individual personality. The higher one stands, the richer the personality, because it lives not only on its own normal level but also on all the levels that are below it and which it has transcended. The complete or integral man, some occultists say, possesses three hundred and sixty-five personalities; indeed it may be much more. The Vedas speak of the three and thirty-three and thirty-three hundred and thirty-three thousand gods that may be housed in the human vehicle — the basic three being evidently the triple status or world of Body, Life and Mind.

What is the meaning of this self-contradiction, this division in man? To understand that, we must know and remember that each person represents a certain quality or capacity, a particular achievement to be embodied. How best can it be done? What is the way by which one can acquire a quality at its purest, highest and most perfect? It is by setting an opposition to it. That is how a power is increased and strengthened — by fighting against and overcoming all that weakens and contradicts it. The deficiencies with respect to a particular quality show you where you have to mend and reinforce

it and in what way to improve it in order to make it perfectly perfect. It is the hammer that beats the weak and soft iron to transform it into hard steel. The preliminary discord is useful and needs to be utilised for a higher harmony. This is the secret of self-conflict in man. You are weakest precisely in that element which is destined to be your greatest asset.

Each man has then a mission to fulfil, a role to play in the universe, a part he has been given to learn and take up in the cosmic Purpose, a part which he alone is capable of executing and none other. This he has to learn and acquire through life-experiences, that is to say, not in one life but in life after life. In fact, that is the meaning of the chain of lives that the individual has to pass through, namely, to acquire experiences and to gather from them the thread — the skein of qualities and attributes, powers and capacities — for the pattern of life he has to weave. Now, the inmost being, the true personality, the central consciousness of the evolving individual is his psychic being. It is, as it were, a very tiny spark of light lying in normal people far behind the life-experiences. In grown-up souls this psychic consciousness has an increased light — increased in intensity, volume and richness. Thus there are old souls and new souls. Old and ancient are those that have reached or are about to reach the fullness of perfection; they have passed through a long history of innumerable lives and developed the most complex and yet the most integrated personality. New souls are those that have just emerged or are now emerging out of the mere physico-vital existence; they are like simple organisms, made of fewer constituents related mostly to the bodily life, with just a modicum of the mental. It is the soul, however, that grows with experiences and it is the soul that builds and enriches the personality. Whatever portion of the outer life, whatever element in the mind or vital or body succeeds in coming into contact with the psychic consciousness — that is to say, is able to come under its influence — is taken up and lodged there: it remains in the psychic being as its living memory and permanent possession. It is such elements that form the basis, the groundwork upon which the structure of the integral and true personality is raised.

The first thing to do then is to find out what it is that you are meant to realise, what is the role you have to play, your particular mission, and the capacity or quality you have to express. You have to discover that and also the thing or things that oppose and do not allow it to flower or come to full manifestation. In other words, you have to know yourself, recognise your soul or psychic being.

For that you must be absolutely sincere and impartial. You must observe yourself as if you were observing and criticising a third person. You must not start with an idea that this is your life's mission, this is your particular capacity, this you are to do or that you are to do, in this lies your talent or genius, etc. That will carry you away from the right track. It is not the liking or disliking of your external being, your mental or vital or physical choice that determines the true line of your growth. Nor should you take up the opposite attitude and say, "I am good for nothing in this matter, I am useless in that one; it is not for me." Neither vanity and arrogance nor self-depreciation

and false modesty should move you. As I said, you must be absolutely impartial and unconcerned. You should be like a mirror that reflects the truth and does not judge.

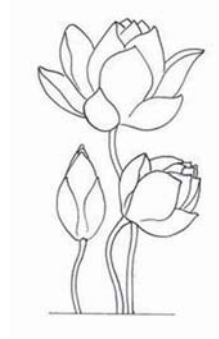
If you are able to keep such an attitude, if you have this repose and quiet trust in your being and wait for what may be revealed to you, then something like this happens: you are, as it were, in a wood, dark and noiseless; you see in front of you merely a sheet of water, dark and still, hardly visible — a bit of a pond imbedded in the obscurity; and slowly upon it a moonbeam is cast and in the cool dim light emerges the calm liquid surface. That is how your secret truth of being will appear and present itself to you at your first contact with it: there you will see gradually reflected the true qualities of your being, the traits of your divine personality, what you really are and what you are meant to be.

One who has thus known himself and possessed himself, conquering all opposition within himself, has by that very fact extended himself and his conquest, making it easier for others to make the same or a similar conquest. These are the pioneers or the elite who by a victorious campaign within themselves help others towards their victory.

12 November 1952

THE MOTHER

(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 334-37)



THE MOTHER SPEAKS ABOUT ALEXANDRA DAVID-NÉEL

AND we have instances of people who are troubled by their own formations, which return constantly as though to take possession of them, and which they can't get rid of because they don't know how to undo the formations they have made. There are more cases of this kind than one would think. When they have made a particularly strong formation — for themselves, you see, relatively — this formation is always tied up with the one who makes it and returns to knock at the brain to receive forces and ends up by truly acting as a necessity. It is a whole world to know; one truly lives in ignorance, one has powers one doesn't know about, so naturally one uses them very badly. One uses them somewhat unconsciously and very badly.

I don't know if you have ever heard of Madame David-Néel who went to Tibet and has written books on Tibet, and who was a Buddhist; and Buddhists — Buddhists of the strictest tradition — do not believe in the Divine, do not believe in his Eternity and do not believe in gods who are truly divine, but they know admirably how to use the mental domain; and Buddhist discipline makes you a good master of the mental instrument and mental domain.

We used to discuss many things and once she told me: "Listen, I made an experiment." (She had studied a bit of theosophy also.) She said: "I formed a *mahatma*; with my thought I formed a *mahatma*." And she knew (this has been proved) that at a given moment mental formations acquire a personal life independent of the fashioner — though they are linked with him — but independent, in the sense that they can have their own will. And so she told me: "Just imagine, I had made my *mahatma* so well that he became a personality independent of me and constantly came to trouble me! He used to come, scold me for one thing, give me advice for another, and he wanted to direct my life; and I could not succeed in getting rid of him. It was extremely difficult, and I didn't know what to do!"

So I asked her how she had tried. She told me how. She said, "He troubles me a lot, my *mahatma* is very troublesome. He does not leave me in peace. He disturbs my meditations, he hinders me from working; and yet I know quite well that it is I who created him, and I can't get rid of him!" Then I said, "That's because you don't have the 'trick' . . ." (*Mother laughs*) And I explained to her what she should do. And the next day — I used to see her almost every day in those days, you see — the next day she came and told me, "Ah, I am freed from my *mahatma*!" (*Laughter*) She had not *cut* the connection because that's of no use. One must know how to *reabsorb* one's creation, that is the only way. To swallow up again one's formations.

But, you see, in a smaller measure and less perfectly one is making formations all the time. When, for instance, one thinks of somebody quite powerfully, there is a

small emanation of mental substance which, instantaneously, goes to this person, you understand, a vibration of your thought which goes and touches his; and if he is receptive, he sees you. He sees you and tells you, "You came last night to see me!" That's because you made a small formation and this formation went and did its work, which was to put you into contact with this person or else to carry a message if you had something special to tell him; and that was done. This happens constantly, but as it is quite a constant and spontaneous phenomenon and done in ignorance, one is not even aware that one does this, one does it automatically.

People who have desires add to the mental formation a kind of small envelope, a vital shell which gives it a still greater reality. These people are usually surrounded by a number of tiny entities which are their own formations, their own mental formations clothed with vital force, which come all the time to strike them to try to make them realise materially the formations they have made.

(Questions and Answers 1954, CWM, Vol. 6, pp. 277-79)

* * *

Last time you said that Madame David-Néel did not know how to swallow up her creation and that you taught her the "trick" of doing it.

(Pavitra repeating aloud) Madame David-Néel did not know how to swallow up her creation. . .

Ah, yes, and so? . . . You want me to give you the trick? *(Laughter)* First wait till you know how to make these creations and I shall give you the "trick" afterwards! *(Laughter)*

(Ibid., p. 290)

* * *

When Mme. David-Néel — I have spoken to you about her, haven't I? Mme. David-Néel who is a militant Buddhist and a great Buddhistic luminary — when she came to India she went to meet some of those great sages or gurus — I shan't give you the names, but she went to one who looked at her and asked her . . . for they were speaking of yoga and personal effort and all that . . . he looked at her and asked her, "Are you indifferent to criticism?" Then she answered him with the classical expression, "Does one care about a dog's barking?" But she added to me when telling me the story, very wittily: "Fortunately he did not ask me whether I was indifferent to compliments, because *that* is much more difficult!"

Still, there we are. Naturally you must avoid thinking that you are in the least superior, and I am going to tell you why. For I have just spoken to you about something

and about an inner realisation, but except for a few vague and imprecise phrases, you would be almost absolutely incapable of telling me what I spoke about. You know vaguely, like that, that we are in the course of doing something, but what it is and what it's leading to and what are the inner changes which can set us a little apart from ordinary humanity, you are not conscious of, and you would feel extremely uneasy if I asked you to explain to me what it is. So, as in a being it is only the consciousness which counts, you must not think yourselves at all superior.

For — one of two things — you cannot think yourselves superior unless you are unconscious. The minute you are truly conscious you lose this notion of superiority and inferiority completely. So, in both the cases, you must not feel yourselves superior — for it is a smallness and a meanness — but feel full of goodwill and sympathy and not care at all for what people say or don't say, but be polite, because it is always preferable to be polite rather than impolite, for you put yourself into contact with more harmonious forces and can fight much better against the forces of destruction and ugliness, for no other reasons than these, because we like harmony and it is better to keep that; but essentially you should be far above all this and feel interested only in your relation with the Divine, what He expects from you and what you want to do for Him. For *this* is the only thing which matters. All the rest has no importance.

There are people who want to show their superiority. This proves that they are quite small. The more one wants to show his superiority, the more it proves that he is quite small. You see, a little child who lives simply without looking at itself and how it lives, is much greater than you because it is spontaneous.

(*Questions and Answers 1955*, CWM, Vol. 7, pp. 388-89)

* * *

. . . indeed, once, very long ago, when I was still in Paris and used to see Mme. David-Néel almost every day, she, you see, was full of her own idea and told me, "You should not think of an action, it means attachment for the action; when you want to do something, it means that you are still tied to the things of this world." Then I told her, "No, there is nothing easier. You have only to imagine *everything* that has been done before and all that will be done later and all that is happening now, and you will then realise that your action is a breath, like this, one second in eternity, and you can no longer be attached to it." At that time I didn't know the text of the Gita. I had not read it completely yet, you see. . . (*some words inaudible here*). . . not this verse which I translate in my own way: "And detached from all fruit of action, act." It is not like this, but still that's what it means. This I did not know, but I said exactly what is said in the Gita.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 392-93)

* * *

(Pavitra shows Mother a photograph of the house in which She lived in Paris, rue du Val de Grâce)

Well, well! The house on Val de Grâce! It looks inhabited, the windows have curtains in them. I lived there — a small house, really very small, with a bedroom upstairs.

Here, this is the kitchen; here is the living room, this is the studio. And then behind the kitchen there was a small room that I used as the dining room, and it opened onto a courtyard. Between the dining room and the kitchen there was a bathroom and a small hallway. The kitchen is here; you went up three steps and then there was this small hallway with the stairs leading up to the bedroom. Next to the bedroom was a bathroom about as big as a thimble.

It is part of a huge house. There's a seven-storey apartment building on each side, and the street is here.

It wasn't very big. The studio was rather large — a beautiful room. . . That's where I received Madame David-Néel — we saw each other nearly every evening.

There was a considerable library in the studio; one whole end was given over to the library — more than two thousand books belonging to my brother. There were even the complete works of several classical writers. And I had my entire collection of the *Revue Cosmique*, and my postcard collection (it was down below) — mainly postcards of Algeria, Tlemcen, nearly 200 of them. But there were five years of the *Revue Cosmique*. And written in such a French! How funny it was!

(From a conversation of 22 October 1960)

* * *

(Regarding a recent note, which Mother has looked for everywhere in vain:)

. . . You know, queer things are happening here. There are certain things that literally disappear, and then, after a few days, they reappear! (*Mother looks for her note again*) I prefer to exhaust all material explanations before making other suppositions. But even someone like Madame David-Néel (and God knows she was positivist in the extreme) herself told me an experience of that sort. I was explaining something to her and she replied, "I am not surprised, because the same thing happened to me. . . ." She had a jewel (it was the time when she used to wear jewels) which she used to keep at the top of a box (inside the box, but at its top). It was a Chinese dragon, and she wanted to wear it one evening. She opened the box, the jewel wasn't there anymore (yet the box was locked inside a cupboard, and there wasn't any sign of theft). She tried, she searched for it, she couldn't find it. Then, four or five days afterwards, she opened the box again, and there was the jewel, just where it was supposed to be! But the same thing happened to me. At the time, I used

to go up on the terrace and I would take a parasol (I had one of those tubes in which umbrellas are put away, and my parasol was there). I looked for it, couldn't find it. I took another one and went upstairs (I looked carefully, examining all the umbrellas one after the other, not just casually; my parasol wasn't there). Then I came back downstairs, didn't bother about it anymore — two days later, it was there!

Things like that happen. . . . Probably little beings having fun.

(From a conversation of 31 July 1964)

* * *

Oh, if you want to be amused, I have received a letter from Alexandra David-Néel. . . . You know that we had been corresponding and that she was the “great protector” of Tibetan lamas (one of them was her “son” and he died there, so she was feeling quite lonely). I told her that we had been put in contact with all those Tibetans and I suggested she might take another one with her (because she had written to me about this). And I added that they would certainly be very glad to serve her in gratitude for the great intellectual progress they would be making with her — she never forgave me! Never forgave me. Because I wrote “intellectual” instead of “spiritual” (I consider she is quite incapable of making anyone progress spiritually, while intellectually, she is first-rate). And since that time, no more letters, nothing. The other day, I got a letter in which she writes (*Mother imitates the supercilious tone of the letter*), “Dear friend of the past, I have heard about the attack on the Ashram” (you should have read the letter, it was marvellous!), “and I hope that nothing untoward has happened to you. But now that the Ashram’s invulnerability has been destroyed, attacks may recur, so I presume you will leave Pondicherry. . . .” (*Mother laughs*) I simply answered her, “Dear friend of always (*laughing*), do not worry, all is well. Above the forces of destruction, there is the divine Grace, which protects and mends”, and I simply put, “Yours very affectionately”. And I enclosed in the letter the message of the 21st.

That woman is eating herself away. Every time I had the opportunity, I spoke to her about Buddha’s love; I told her, “But Buddha was full of love!” And that makes her blood boil! Well.

(From a conversation of 24 February 1965)

* * *

. . . Yes, Kalki. The description is very similar.

And the Maitreya Buddha, too.

Yes, but it seems we should be more cautious about him. According to Alexandra David-Néel, it's not a truly authentic text, it came afterwards, after Buddha's descendants: it isn't what Buddha himself is said to have preached. There is a controversy here. Of course, Alexandra belonged to the Buddhism of the South, which is very rigid and absolutely rejects all the fancies of the Buddhism of the North with its innumerable bodhisattvas and all the stories (they've got so many stories! pulp novels). And she rejected all that, saying it wasn't part of Buddha's authentic teaching. Buddha said that the world, this terrestrial world (maybe the universe, I don't know, the point isn't very clear), in any case the terrestrial world is the result of Desire (but I know someone who used to say [*laughing*], "Yes, it's God's desire to manifest!"), and that when "Desire" disappears, the world will disappear and there will be Nirvana. In other words, once the desire to manifest has disappeared, there is no Manifestation anymore. I don't think Buddha was ignorant; I think he knew very well the existence of invisible beings, of immortal beings (what men call gods) and probably the existence of a supreme God, too — he very likely knew it. But he didn't want people to think about it because it appeared to contradict his opinion that the world was the result of Desire and that, once Desire was withdrawn, the world withdrew — if there is an immortal world, things cannot happen that way. Basically, the further one goes, the more one realises that all human teachings are opportunistic: they are told with an aim "in view"; one thing is told, and the other (not that it's not known) is deliberately ignored. It seems hard to me to find a different explanation, because as soon as you have passed beyond the Mind (and those people appear to have done so), all knowledge is . . . (what's the word?) *available*, obtainable.

(From a conversation of 20 March 1965)

* * *

I remember, once, it was with Madame David-Néel. It's very interesting. She came to give a lecture (I wasn't acquainted with her, that's where I met her for the first time), I think it was at the Theosophical Society (I forget). I went to the lecture, and while she was speaking, I saw Buddha — I saw him clearly: not above her head, a little to the side. He was present. So after the lecture, I was introduced to her (I didn't know the kind of woman she was!), and I said to her, "Oh, Madam, during your speech I saw Buddha present." She answered me (*in a furious tone*), "Impossible! Buddha is in Nirvana!" (*Mother laughs*) Oho! . . . "Better keep quiet!" I thought.

But he really was there, whatever she thought!

(From a conversation of 9 November 1966)

THE MOTHER

A BUDDHIST STORY

The following story was told by Mother during one of the Friday classes, generally reserved for readings to the children.

As I am still unable to read to you this evening, I am going to tell you a story. It is a Buddhist story which perhaps you know, it is modern but has the merit of being authentic. I heard it from Madame Z who, as you probably know, is a well-known Buddhist, especially as she was the first European woman to enter Lhasa. Her journey to Tibet was very perilous and thrilling and she narrated one of the incidents of this journey to me, which I am going to tell you this evening.

She was with a certain number of fellow travellers forming a sort of caravan, and as the approach to Tibet was relatively easier through Indo-China, they were going from that side. Indo-China is covered with large forests, and these forests are infested with tigers, some of which become man-eaters . . . and when that happens they are called: "Mr. Tiger."

Late one evening, when they were in the thick of the forest — a forest they had to cross in order to be able to camp safely — Madame Z realised that it was her meditation hour. Now, she used to meditate at fixed times, very regularly, without ever missing one and as it was time for her meditation she told her companions, "Continue the journey, I shall sit here and do my meditation, and when I have finished I shall join you; meanwhile, go on to the next stage and prepare the camp." One of the coolies told her, "Oh! no, Madam, this is impossible, quite impossible" — he spoke in his own language, naturally, but I must tell you Madame Z knew Tibetan like a Tibetan — "it is quite impossible, Mr. Tiger is in the forest and now is just the time for him to come and look for his dinner. We can't leave you and you can't stop here!" She answered that it did not bother her at all, that the meditation was much more important than safety, that they could all withdraw and that she would stay there alone.

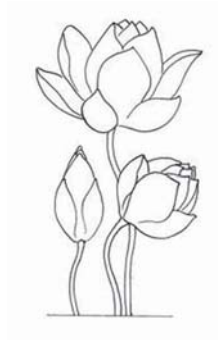
Very reluctantly they started off, for it was impossible to reason with her — when she had decided to do something nothing could prevent her from doing it. They went away and she sat down comfortably at the foot of a tree and entered into meditation. After a while she felt a rather unpleasant presence. She opened her eyes to see what it was . . . and three or four steps away, right in front of her was Mr. Tiger! — with eyes full of greed. So, like a good Buddhist, she said, "Well, if this is the way by which I shall attain Nirvana, very good. I have only to prepare to leave my body in a suitable way, in the proper spirit." And without moving, without even the least quiver, she closed her eyes again and entered once more into meditation; a somewhat deeper, more intense meditation, detaching herself completely from the illusion of

the world, ready to pass into Nirvana. . . . Five minutes went by, ten minutes, half an hour — nothing happened. Then as it was time for the meditation to be over, she opened her eyes . . . and there was no tiger! Undoubtedly, seeing such a motionless body it must have thought it was not fit for eating! For tigers, like all wild animals, except the hyena, do not attack and eat a dead body. Impressed probably by this immobility — I dare not say by the intensity of the meditation! — it had withdrawn and she found herself quite alone and out of danger. She calmly went her way and on reaching camp said, “Here I am.”

That’s my story. Now we are going to meditate like her, not to prepare ourselves for Nirvana (*laughter*), but to heighten our consciousness!

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1957-1958, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, pp. 53-54*)



“BIRDS IN THE NIGHT”
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Three nights back I was delighted to hear birds start chirping, without apparent cause, in the trees near our house. And this lyric embodies the suggestion given by that pleasure but can you really assure me that it is worth preserving?

Amazed I hear to-night
A sudden chirrup of birds —
Undreamable delight
Of quivering ~~secret~~ words. [1]
magic

~~What richens them with joy~~ [2]
Why are they rich with joy
When hollow glooms surround?
What streams of fire upbuoy
Their tiny boats of sound?

O birds, whom do you praise
From your green slumbering height?
You have not seen Her face,
The wondrous Day of our night!

Her
Nor known ~~its~~ quiet call [3]
Out of the Spirit's deep
Arise to golden all
The penury of sleep!

My heart for
~~For my heart~~ ever sings, [4]
From mortal glooms withdrawn,
Because Her calm mouth brings
A smile of deathless dawn.

[Amal's questions written in the left margin]

[1] Is “little” better than either “secret” or “magic”?
 [4] or “But”? [But my heart ever sings]

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

[1] Magic is more in consonance with the line of the poem. [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “secret”*]

[2] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out this line*]

[3] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “its”*]

[4] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out “For my heart”*]

It is a very beautiful little lyric.

7 October 1934

* * *

BIRDS IN THE NIGHT

Amazed I hear tonight
 A sudden chirrup of birds —
 Undreamable delight
 Of quivering magic words.

Why are they rich with joy
 When hollow glooms surround?
 What streams of fire upbuoy
 Their tiny boats of sound?

O birds, whom do you praise
 From your green slumbering height?
 You have not seen Her face,
 The wondrous Day of our night! —

Nor known Her quiet call
 Out of the Spirit’s deep
 Arise to golden all
 The penury of sleep!

My heart for ever sings,
 From mortal glooms withdrawn,
 Because Her calm mouth brings
 A smile of deathless dawn.

(From *The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran]*, 1993, p. 475)

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of July 2009)

Chapter Four

(Continued)

New Projects

Draft of a letter from Paul to Philippe

June 25, 1923

My dear Philippe,

Now that you are back on the earth and like an ordinary mortal are thinking of tying the knot, and as, moreover, you are asking for my opinion on the matter, it will be ungracious of me not to come out of my disapproving silence. So I will reply to your letter.

I shall not give you the classic reply of Panurge to Pantagruel,¹ even though it really contains the whole issue, but Rabelais is not an author exotic enough for you to savour fully. I shall therefore tell you simply some of the thoughts that your letter has brought to my mind.

In principle, I am not biased, I am not opposed to your marrying a Jewess, a Japanese or an Indian; to tell you that it pleases me, — frankly no, above all if, as you say, the semitic traits are very marked. The prospect of having grandchildren bearing my name and having these characteristics does not fill me with joy. Education, respect for the individual, human weakness, perhaps, but is one sure to be always free of them and will you not yourself regret it one day?

In any case, there must be serious reasons to overlook these considerations. Well do I know that in your eyes these family considerations do not carry much weight. It is the logical consequence of the doctrine of reincarnation; if one has shaped oneself through successive lives, and one's stage of evolution depends only on oneself, family, race, country — all that counts for little. Moreover, you have demonstrated that well. This is where, after all, that doctrine leads, and one can judge its value by the

1. In the *Tiers Livre*, by Rabelais.

consequences that follow: to deny the bonds of solidarity which unite you to the beings in whose midst nature has made you to be born; not to recognise that it is to them that you owe your first duties; to disregard that which has made you what you are, — education, training, thoughts, — the common heritage slowly acquired by the generations which have preceded you and that therefore you are accountable **first** to them and their children who have contributed to constitute this common heritage. Isn't there a sort of treason to deliver to foreigners what you have received from your own people? Treason is probably a little too strong a word; let us say that there is ingratitude in not giving to those from whom one has received. Not to forget even more that the *École Polytechnique* is a government school² and that receiving one's training there entails an obligation for a special commitment.

It is evidently easy to consider oneself as somebody special, to pass for a spirit liberated from vulgar prejudices by undoing this solidarity, but isn't it done through contempt of some duty, and those who applaud you, are they not the ones to profit from it? It is all a matter of one's conscience.

As for my opinion that you ask for — what do you want me to say? — the very basis is faulty. You have not considered it necessary to inform me about the reasons which have prompted you to suddenly break so many years of effort; you never answered my letter in which I raised this question and told you that you owed me an explanation! There lies my main grievance against you and the reason for my silence. Did you then consider these motives to be so fragile, so little capable of resisting my criticism, so puerile in fact, that you did not dare to tell me about them?

I cannot, therefore, calculate the force of your ideas nor how long they will last, but one must admit, from experience, that ideas change and one must be wary of committing one's whole life to a point of view which is bound to alter.

First and foremost, one must know well one's nature which never changes. I think that you are right when you enumerate the conditions of life which seem to be better suited to your aspirations: a simple and healthy physical life, the eliminating of everything that is unnecessary, however, without asceticism, no all-absorbing profession with the constant preoccupation of earning a living, the maximum free time possible to devote oneself to studies of one's choice! Good Lord, don't I subscribe to your programme! It has always been mine, also my father's (and of lots of people). We had the taste for speculation of the mind, a fear of a warping profession, and a horror of the contingencies of life. I see your grandfather again, coming back from the office; he would translate Horace in verse or devote himself to his research on Port-Royal which he was particularly fond of. But for that, there is no need to forego any duty. It is the very programme which you yourself had worked out with our help, and which you abandoned when you were caught up in this wind of folly. Alas, I have not yet understood! But in these conditions what do you want marriage for? We must

2. No, not of the government, but of the State!

then admit that this marriage, which your being, weary and repelled, seems to yearn for, will meet the conditions which will let you carry out this programme. But then, mind you: if it is that, it is a business deal, and in such matters it is generally a bad deal.

Is it that the people around you are pushing you into this marriage? Be careful not to be a dupe once again. Your letter does not radiate much enthusiasm. You yourself say that it is not love that guides you. Then what?

Listen, in spite of the pain and the sense of deception that your desertion has caused us — about which the least that we can say is that, the affection of your parents and the trust in your father (which is a form of filial respect) were not enough to keep you safe — we on our part do not forget that you are our child. This then is what I advise:

If you want to examine your feelings and see clearly into yourself, you must look at the question from another side, and for that you must change the conditions of the moment and the location, that is to say, the environment. I advise you to return to Paris to see us and to write to Mademoiselle F. . . ; since she likes to travel and her brother lives here, she could very well come to see him. We shall receive her gladly and you will be able to judge for yourself the sincerity of your sentiments and the nature of your aspirations.

The house is open to you. I don't say that we shall put it at your disposal as before. We have put on years, acquired habits and also probably gained some experience. We consider that we have fulfilled our duty towards our children by guiding them up to the time when they could become self-sufficient, but we shall willingly offer you the hospitality between the two stages of your life.

Your mother's life is constrained by physical suffering. Certainly, her innate delicateness plays a great role in it, but the suffering exists, we know it now. She was not wrong in blaming the X-rays. The doctors' opinion is that she was burnt by these rays whose effects were not properly understood in the early stages, and her nerves, at least the ones on her skin are affected and cause her suffering which her sensitivity increases tenfold. The skin from the affected area may have to be removed. For the present we are trying the application of infrared rays which will relax the stiffness of the nerves. Only in autumn shall we decide on the removal of the skin; her *karma* is painful.

We shall leave for La Minelle in a few days and we shall be there till October. I embrace you very affectionately.

Your father,

Signed: Paul St Hilaire³

3. Paul had altered this letter; probably thinking that it was not quite appropriate, he had recopied it and had kept the original in his possession.

P.S. If you need money for your return journey, ask Monsieur Wagner on my behalf. What you had borrowed from him I have already repaid.

* * *

Tokyo, August 11, 1923

My dear Parents,

I am taking advantage of this young Japanese, — who speaks good French but whom I myself do not know, — going to Paris and who is willing to carry a little packet for you, to send you some small souvenirs. These things are not of much value, but they are original because they are certainly made in Japan, and I am sending them to you with all my love.

There is a cigarette box especially for Papa and a round box especially for Maman, a little silver box as a curio, a portable paintbrush equivalent to our fountain pen, and also a Buddhist rosary. I am enclosing two photographs, one dated the month of April, and the other taken during the visit of Prince Chichibu (second son of the Emperor) to the laboratory; I am showing him something. Also a sketch of my face, done by a Japanese painter.

I embrace you very lovingly.

Signed: Philippe

P.S. I am adding a few picture postcards of a journey that I just made to the interior of Japan. I stayed for ten days in Koya-San, a Buddhist Monastery at a height of 1200 metres, where I saw beautiful works of art and also interesting things from the religious and philosophical point of view, although here too, the priests are not quite what they should be. After that, I visited Nara and Kyoto, two charming big towns.

* * *

Tokyo, September 5, 1923

Very dear Parents,

I hope that you would have received news of me before this letter reaches you and I am extremely worried about the anxiety caused to you during such a long time.

I have already sent my name to the French Embassy⁴ and I am going to try so that the American Embassy passes on my name as being safe and sound. Perhaps through this route the news will reach you. Two thirds of Tokyo is completely burnt and the remaining one third is badly damaged. Fortunately for us, the area where we are was not affected, and apart from a few roof-tiles which have fallen down, our house is almost intact.

But Tokyo has passed through a very hard ordeal; the number of the dead is over twenty thousand, burnt or crushed. The Japanese houses in general are practically intact having withstood the earthquake, except the old and cheap buildings. As for the stone houses, their fate has been varied; the ones with steel frames have collapsed, whereas those in reinforced concrete, if they had been well constructed, have held out. Bricks and stones are not enough.

More than two million people are homeless, it is incredible. Luckily, it is summer and not winter. In our house there are twelve of us. Unfortunately there isn't much to eat. Many people have absolutely nothing. We are not to be pitied, we have some tinned food, some fruits and vegetables, but no bread or rice. It is, above all, rice that is in short supply.

Of the French in Tokyo, I have no knowledge of anybody missing. A large number of foreigners were on their summer holidays. I had returned a fortnight ago. As for Yokohama, the news that we have is far from reassuring; I think it has suffered more than Tokyo.

The big quake occurred on the first of September at midday, but the intensity weakened little by little; tonight again there were a dozen tremors. Two nights we have slept in the garden; to have stayed in the house would have been imprudent. At no time, even during the big quakes when I was on the second storey of the reinforced concrete building where my laboratory is, was I the least bit in the world nervous or afraid. All the bottles fell, the walls cracked, and the fire started later. I was the last to leave and before going I put out the fire with the extinguisher.

I am perfectly unharmed, my friends also; my address has not changed. I embrace you with all my heart.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

4. Paul had written to Madame Poincaré for news. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had sent him a reply on September 7, that they were referring the matter to the Consul in Kobe.

Tokyo, September 10, 1923

Dear Parents,

I am sending you a telegram⁵ today to reassure you. I hope that it will reach you speedily. I could not do it earlier, not even today: the post office in Tokyo is not accepting telegrams to foreign countries. A friend who is going to Kobe has agreed to send it off. I have also sent you a detailed letter with la Sibérie (a lady who is going to Poland). I have written to Albert to send you a letter right away. In short, I think that you will receive my news at the earliest possible.

I am getting on admirably well. Among my close friends, there are very few casualties because most of them live in the outlying areas of Tokyo. My factory was slightly damaged but the work has already resumed. The factory too is not in the centre of the city.

You must have read an account of the catastrophe in the newspapers. Although there was some exaggeration at the beginning, what is certain is that of the two thirds of Tokyo which was burnt, nothing remains. In just one area, thirty thousand people who had gathered there were burnt alive, isn't it terrible? I have not yet decided what I am going to do. My friend, Monsieur Raymond, the architect, suggests that I work with him because there will be lots of interesting work at his place, but I am very hesitant; it is easy for you to understand why.

I shall write to you at length another time about all this. Meanwhile, I embrace you very tenderly and affectionately.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Tokyo, November 27, 1923

Very dear Papa,

I have just received your letter dated October 21. No, I have not at all estranged myself from you. If I have not answered your letter of June 27 it is for several reasons. First, the earthquake was the main subject of my letters to you and Albert, and then there is nothing new after my last letter in which I spoke to you about my project. And lastly, the lady in question is in America, as I wrote to you. What this calamity will change in these plans, I do not know, but it is likely that she will remain there

5. It was sent on the 15th from the post office at Kobe.

longer than she had planned when she left. She knows nothing of the ideas that I have had and I shall be very careful not to influence her at present. Maybe we shall meet again, face to face, one day.

My language may seem strange to you and from that you may conclude that my ideas change rapidly and that probably I am influenced. Actually the reason is quite different: it stems from the great difficulty in taking a decision. I weigh perfectly the pros and the cons of each thing so well that they seem to me almost equivalent. I think you know very well what I am talking about. Moreover, the majority of the people decide not after judging the pros and the cons of which I have just spoken, but according to completely different reasons, for the most part emotional, in any case, personal and limited. And my wish would be to take my decision according to the laws which are superior to the laws of the personality. In one word, my ideal would be to live **in harmony** with the natural laws of the cosmos. Well, when we decide to weigh our actions properly we perceive how difficult it is to make up our mind. It is easy to understand the cosmic laws intuitively, but it is difficult to apply them in the day-to-day life. This is the problem which all those who endeavour to detach themselves from their personality have to face. It is not at all a withdrawal from this world into solitude but a detachment from oneself, from one's ego, from one's petty interests, all this while living in this world, giving help and love around oneself, understanding from the hard lessons of the life. You see, it is very simple, this is the explanation of my indecision.

Rest assured, dear Papa, I am free, perfectly free. This is a result, one of the fruits which I have acquired painfully by my departure and my hard labour since. I am, as I recently said to a Theosophist lady from Paris who has come to Japan, I am free **of people** and **of schools**. And that is a lot! I realise all that this means, and of everything that holds me without my knowledge. Intellectually, morally, spiritually, I am independent. The bonds by which I am attached to some people, to you, to my Master, have nothing of servitude in it, they are made out of love and affection and are perfectly voluntary. I don't know of any other kind. Let me assure you that my affection for you has become more beautiful and more comprehensive. I was young and I have matured. I realise a little better some of the whys of life, the double aspect, real and unreal, of this drama in which we are the actors and which we play with so much passion. I have begun to understand the values of space and of time, those two great illusions, and I try with all my powers, to put myself above, in the region of joy and pure existence. It is a kind of mysticism, if you like, but it is at once personal and universal: personal in this sense that it is I who must walk on this path, alone, that the help that I can receive is of the nature of an indication and of a comforting word; universal also, because everything is included in it, there is nothing which may be separated from me and which must one day be reunited there.

It is difficult to explain to you in words the state of my soul, I have noticed that already and each time I want to try, I risk making you misunderstand me because of

the imperfection of my expression. I would like that you do not try to understand intellectually, but that for a few seconds you put your heart in unison with mine.

With regard to what concerns my practical life, there too nothing has changed, always the same work and the same situation. From time to time I make some plans, but I realise the inanity of making personal plans. The great current pushes me, as it pushes us, all of us, towards our goal, and why desire to steer ourselves somewhere else when we are going where we should. You know this sentence which summarises the whole philosophy of Lao Tzu: "The wise man does not act, yet is he never inactive." I begin to understand its paradoxical meaning, without boasting of any wisdom for that. I wish, dear Papa, that you see nothing in my letter other than an effort towards the union and the mutual understanding of our souls.

You do not mention my telegram, have you not received it? I had sent it "acknowledgement due" dated the 15th September from the Post Office in Kobe. It reads thus:

"Saint Hilaire. 20 Rue Pigalle. Paris

"All is well. Philippe"

Au revoir, dear Papa and Maman, I embrace both of you very affectionately. My remembrances to friends and the family.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Tokyo, January 15, 1924

Very dear Papa,

Your letter, at the end of November, gave me sad news. I can very well imagine all the troubles that this fire in La Minelle and all the new work to be done in the depths of winter have caused you, the winter of Haute-Saône of which my childhood memories still retain some pictures. I remember the distillery⁶ and the path that I took with Maman between the house and the factory. I remember also skating on the Coney and the races where you gave a cigar to the winner. They are almost my only memories of winter in Corre, I must have been very young. However, I can well imagine your life there and I think much of you. The fire in the cheese factory was a thing of which we often thought and sometimes you spoke to me of the danger of the hay-loft being so close to the house. It is really fortunate that our house is safe; I even ask myself how that was possible. It is true that now I am used

6. Before building the cheese factory of La Minelle, Paul was running a distillery situated in Corre.

to the wooden houses in Japan where a fire spreads fast to several hundred houses.

What caused the fire? Is it known? I hope that your insurance policy was properly made, otherwise it will be a very heavy loss. I do not know exactly what the new organisation of La Minelle is; I know that it is a co-operative but that is all. I wrote to you on this subject, but you have not told me anything about it. Maybe you will not have to pass the whole winter there. I should like that very much for you and also for Maman.

On my side, nothing new. This morning we had quite a strong tremor, the most powerful since the first of September last, but there has been very little damage in Tokyo, only a dozen dead, and fortunately, no fire.

From the moral and spiritual point of view, I have a general feeling that I am ending one period of my life and soon a new path will open itself for me. It also seems to me that I have more or less accomplished what I had to do at present. Where will my path lead me? That is more than I can say now. Perhaps I shall spend some time in India? I shall tell you all about it later, in more detail. For the present, do not judge me too hastily and do not let yourself be too much surprised by what you call my change in ideas. I have explained this to you to some extent in my last letter which, I hope, you have received.

This year I have not sent New Year cards or letters to the family. The postal tariffs have gone up and it would have cost me quite a lot. The 20 sen stamp that you see on my letter costs 1.80 francs⁷ at the present rate of exchange. Last year, I had sent some thirty cards to Europe. To those who are close to me, please convey my good wishes and thoughts. And for you, my very dear Papa and Maman, my heart forms more good wishes than I can write in a letter. If I prayed like a little child, I could have told you that I pray often for you, but after all, my thoughts for you are probably the best prayer.

I embrace you very affectionately.

Signed: Philippe

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original French *Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle* by Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire, published by Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 2001.

Our thanks for their kind permission.)

7. About 1.2 Euro.

Addendum 1

PANURGE AND PANTAGRUEL ON MARRIAGE

In one of his letters to Philippe, his father refers to a passage from the French comic writer François Rabelais (1494 – 1553). We present a passage here: Chapter IX and the beginning of Chapter X of the Third Book — Tiers Livre of Rabelais in which Panurge asks Pantagruel’s advice whether he should marry or not.

The language of the original, and this translation as well, may seem quaint, the content may raise certain eyebrows, but we hope our readers will not take it amiss.

We can but quote Rabelais’s prefatory verse to his book:

*Amys, Lecteurs, & c.
Kind readers, who vouchsafe to cast an eye
On what ensues, lay all prevention by.
Let not my book your indignation raise:
It means no harm, no poison it conveys.
Except in point of laughing, it is true,
'Twont teach you much: It being all my view
To inspire with mirth the hearts of those that moan,
And change to laughter the afflictive groan:
For laughter is man’s property alone.*

Victor Hugo spoke of “Rabelais’ enormous laughter”.

And Sri Aurobindo in one of the aphorisms writes:

*God’s laughter is sometimes very coarse and unfit for polite ears;
He is not satisfied with being Molière, He must needs also be
Aristophanes and Rabelais.*

(CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 432)

To this Pantagruel replying nothing, Panurge prosecuted the discourse he had already broached; and therewithal fetching, as from the bottom of his heart, a very deep sigh, said, “My lord and master, you have heard the design I am upon, which is to marry, if by some disastrous mischance, all the holes in the world be not shut up, stopped, closed, and bushed. I humbly beseech you, for the affection which of a long

time you have borne me, to give me your best advice therein.”

“Then,” answered Pantagruel, “seeing you have so decreed and taken deliberation thereon, and that the matter is fully determined, what need is there of any further talk thereof, but forthwith to put into execution what you have resolved.”

“Yea, but,” quoth Panurge, “I would be loth to act anything therein without your counsel had thereto.”

“It is my judgment also,” quoth Pantagruel, “and I advise you to it.”

“Nevertheless,” quoth Panurge, “if you think that it were much better for me to remain a bachelor, as I am, than to run headlong upon new hair-brained undertakings of conjugal adventure, I would rather choose not to marry.”

“Not marry then,” said Pantagruel.

“Yea, but,” quoth Panurge, “would you have me so solitarily drag out the whole course of my life, without the comfort of a matrimonial consort? You know it is written *Voe soli*: and a single person is never seen to reap the joy and solace that is found among those that are wedlocks.”

“Wedlock it then, in the name of God,” quoth Pantagruel.

“But if,” quoth Panurge, “my wife should make me a cuckold; as it is not unknown unto you, how this hath been a very plentiful year in the production of that kind of cattle; I should fly off the hinges, and grow impatient, beyond all measure and mean. I love cuckolds indeed at my heart; for they seem unto me to be of a right honest conversation, and I, truly, do very willingly frequent their company: but should I die for it, I would not be one of their number: that is a point for me of a too sure prickling point, and too hard a knot.”

“Not marry then,” quoth Pantagruel: “for without all controversy, this sentence of Seneca is infallibly true, ‘What thou to others shalt have done, others will do the like to thee.’ ”

“Do you,” quoth Panurge, “aver that without all exception?”

“Without all exception,” quoth Pantagruel.

“Ho, ho,” says Panurge, “by the wrath of a devil, his meaning is, either in this world, or in the other, which is to come. Yet seeing I can no more do without a wife, than a blind man without his staff; for the funnel must be in agitation, without which manner of occupation I cannot live; were it not a great deal better for me to apply and associate myself to some one honest, lovely, and virtuous woman, than (as I do) by a new change of females every day, run a hazard of being bastinadoed, or (which is worse) of the great pox, if not of both together, for never had I enjoyment yet of an honest woman, be it spoken by leave and favour of the husbands.”

“Husband then be, in God’s name,” quoth Pantagruel.

“But if,” quoth Panurge, “it were the will of God, and that my destiny did unluckily lead me to marry an honest woman who would beat me, I should be stored with more than two third parts of the patience of Job, if I were not stark mad by it, and quite distracted with such rugged dealings: for it hath been told me, that those exceeding

honest women have ordinarily very perverse headpieces; therefore is it that their family lacketh not for good vinegar. Yet in that case should it go worse with me, if I did not then in such sort bang her back and breast, so thumpingly bethwack her giblets, to wit, her arms, legs, head, lights, liver, and milt, with her other entrails, and mangle, jag, and slash her coats, so after the cross-billet fashion, that the greatest devil of hell should wait at the gate for the reception of her damned soul. I could make a shift for this year to wave such molestation and disquiet, and be content to lay aside that trouble, and engage not in it.”

“Engage not in it then,” answered Pantagruel.

“Yea, but,” quoth Panurge, “considering the condition wherein I now am, out of debt and unmarried: mark what I say, free from all debt, in an ill hour! for were I deeply on the score, my creditors would be chary of my sweet paternity: but being quit, and not married, nobody will be so regardful of me, or carry towards me a love like that which is said to be in a conjugal affection. And if by some mishap I should fall sick, I should be looked to very waywardly. The wise man saith, where there is no woman (I mean the mother of a family, and wife in the union of a lawful wedlock) the crazy and diseased are in danger of being ill used, and of having much brabbling and strife about them; as by clear experience hath been made apparent in the persons of popes, legates, cardinals, bishops, abbots, priors, priests, and monks: but there, assure yourself, you shall not bind me.”

“Bind thee then, in the name of God,” answered Pantagruel.

“But if,” quoth Panurge, “being ill at ease, and possibly through that distemper, made unable to discharge the matrimonial duty that is incumbent to an active husband; my wife, impatient of that drooping sickness, and faint fits of a pining languishment, should abandon and prostitute herself to the embraces of another man; and not only then not help and assist me in my extremity and need, but withal flout at, and make sport of that my grievous distress and calamity; or peradventure (which is worse) embezzle my goods, and steal from me, as I have seen it often-times befall unto the lot of many other men; it were enough to undo me utterly, to fill brimful the cup of my misfortune, and make me play the madpate reeks of a bedlamite, or wild bear.”

“Bear without marrying then,” quoth Pantagruel.

“Yea, but,” said Panurge, “I shall never by any other means come to have lawful sons and daughters, in whom I may harbour some hope of perpetuating my name and arms, and to whom also I may leave and bequeath my inheritances and purchased goods (of which latter sort you need not doubt, but that, in some one or other of these mornings, I will make a fair and goodly show) that so I may cheer up and make merry, when otherwise I should be plunged into a peevish mood of pensive sullenness; as I do perceive daily by the carriage of your gracious father towards you; as all honest folks use to do at their own homes and private dwelling-houses. For being free from debt, and yet not married, if casually I should fret and be angry, although the cause of my grief and displeasure were never so just, I am afraid, instead of consolation,

that I should meet with nothing else but scuffs, frumps, gibes, and mocks at my misadventure.”

“Venture then, in the name of God,” quoth Pantagruel: “and thus have I given you my advice.”

...

“Your counsel,” quoth Panurge, “under your correction and favour, seemeth unto me not unlike to the song of gammer yea-by-nay; . . . I know not,” added Panurge, which of all your answers to lay hold on.”

“Good reason why,” quoth Pantagruel, “for your proposals are so full of ifs and buts, that I can ground nothing on them, nor pitch upon any solid and positive determination satisfactory of what is demanded by them. . . .

FRANÇOIS RABELAIS

(From *THE WORKS OF RABELAIS* faithfully translated from the French, privately printed; pp. 249-51. No other detail available.)

We always long for the forbidden things, and desire what is denied us.

* * *

The farce is finished. I go to seek a vast perhaps.

François Rabelais

Addendum 2

A NOTE ON THE JAPANESE EARTHQUAKE OF 1923

ON September 1, 1923, just before noon, an earthquake occurred near the densely populated, modern industrial cities of Tokyo and Yokohama, Japan. The epicentre was placed in Sagami Bay, just southwest of Tokyo Bay. Destruction ranged from far up into the Hakone mountains, home to popular tourist resorts, to the busy shipping lanes of Yokohama Bay, north to the city of Tokyo.

Though not the largest earthquake to ever hit Japan, the proximity to Tokyo and Yokohama and the surrounding areas, with combined populations numbering 2 million, made it one of the most devastating quakes ever to hit Japan. Tokyo's principle business and industrial districts lay in ruins.

The quake is remembered by Japanese authors as the Great Kantō Earthquake, Kantō being the name of the region which includes Tokyo.

The Great Kantō Earthquake (*Kantō daishinsai*) struck the Kantō plain on the Japanese main island of Honshū at 11:58:44 on the morning of September 1, 1923. Varied accounts hold that the duration of the earthquake was between 4 and 10 minutes.

The quake had a magnitude of 8.3 on the Richter scale and caused widespread damage throughout the Kantō region. The power and intensity of the earthquake is easy to underestimate, but the 1923 earthquake managed to move the 93-ton Great Buddha statue at Kamakura. The statue slid forward almost two feet.

Casualty estimates range from about 100,000 to 142,000 deaths, the latter figure including approximately 40,000 who went missing and were presumed dead.

Because the earthquake struck at lunchtime when many people were using fire to cook food, the damage and the number of fatalities were augmented due to fires which broke out in numerous locations. The fires spread rapidly due to high winds from a nearby typhoon off the coast of Noto Peninsula in Northern Japan and some developed into firestorms which swept across cities. This caused many to die when their feet got stuck in melting tarmac; however, the single greatest loss of life occurred when approximately 38,000 people packed into an open space at the Rikugun Honjo Hifukusho (Former Army Clothing Depot) in downtown Tokyo were incinerated by a firestorm-induced fire whirl. As the earthquake had caused water mains to break, putting out the fires took nearly two full days until late in the morning of September 3. The fires were the biggest cause of death.

The Imperial Palace caught fire, but the Prince Regent was unharmed. The Emperor and Empress were at Nikko when the earthquake struck the city, and were never in any danger.

Cases of homes being buried or swept away by landslides were particularly

frequent in the mountainous areas and hilly coastal areas in western Kanagawa Prefecture. These cases are reported to account for the deaths of about 800 people. At the railway station in the village of Nebukawa, west of Odawara, a collapsing mountainside pushed a passing passenger train with over 100 passengers downhill into the sea along with the entire station structure and the village itself. A tsunami reached the coast within minutes in some areas, hitting the coast of Sagami Bay, Boso Peninsula, Izu Islands and the east coast of Izu Peninsula. Tsunamis of up to 10 metres were recorded. Examples of tsunami damage include about 100 people killed along Yui-ga-hama beach in Kamakura and an estimated 50 people on the Enoshima causeway. Over 570,000 homes were destroyed, leaving an estimated 1.9 million homeless.

(From the Wikipedia and other Internet resources)

We learn geology the morning after the earthquake.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

* * *

*An earthquake achieves what the law promises but does not in practice maintain
— the equality of all men.*

Ignazio Silon

GOD AND THE WORLD IN JEWISH MYSTICISM, HINDUISM AND SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

EVERY major religion of the world includes two types of understanding or view about the nature of God, His relation with the world and the way of approaching Him — one is traditional or orthodox, and the other is mystical. The differences between these views seem to divide the theology of a religion into two groups or schools, viz., traditional and mystical. Many of the differences between the religions usually lie in the traditional beliefs and practices of respective religions, and the practices deal mostly with rituals and observances. The mystical parts or aspects of different religions, on the other hand, have significant similarities. There are several Christian mystics whose views based on their personal experience are different from traditional Christian views in some respects and are similar to those of the mystics of Hinduism. For example, Meister Eckhart, a medieval Christian mystic, expressed his view of the oneness or unity of all beings. A more contemporary example is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Roman Catholic Priest and philosopher. The similarities of his views about evolution and universal consciousness and those of the Hindu philosopher, Sri Aurobindo, are recognised and written about in several books and articles (Sethna, Zaehner). It is also well-known that some of the views and practices of the Islamic mystical group of Sufis have striking similarities with Hindu Yoga. The Jewish mystical tradition and Hinduism also have similarities, which are not well known, and it is this similarity that this article will examine. This article will focus primarily on only one subject or issue of theology — the concept of God and His relation with the world and its creatures. For Jewish mysticism I will draw mostly from the Kabbalah, and for Hinduism my main sources will be the Bhagavad Gita (or simply Gita) and the writings of Sri Aurobindo.

Concepts of God in Traditional Judaism

The original source of traditional or orthodox Judaism is the Hebrew Bible, or Torah, which includes the five books of Moses — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Torah was interpreted and taught by Rabbis, who are ordained Jewish teachers, and Tannaim, who are Jewish scholars. The theology of traditional Judaism is reflected in the teachings of Rabbis and Tannaim; these teachings are recorded in the literature known as Talmud and Midrash. However, Rabbinic theology took different tones as it developed in various places of the

world during different periods as the Jews dispersed in different countries in the Middle East and Europe.

There are two competing ideas about God, which are reflected in Rabbinic theology. On one hand God is a transcendent Supreme Being who created the world, but remains outside of it. This concept emphasises that God is unknowable and beyond the imagination of human beings. Thus any form of idolatry is prohibited in Judaism. Further, God may be known by different names, but He is one and the same. (Monotheism is a fundamental concept in Judaism.) The difficulty for common people to understand the inaccessible character or status of God is obvious, and Rabbinic theology overcame this difficulty by including a parallel idea that despite the transcendence of God He is very near to His creatures, accessible, and He hears man's prayers. These two different ideas about God — His transcendence and nearness — coexist in traditional Judaism without clear reconciliation in theological terms.

During the Middle Ages and later there were several Jewish philosophers who contributed to Jewish theology. Some of them held very different views about God. Noteworthy among them are two famous philosophers — Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) and Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677). While Maimonides believed in the transcendence and remoteness of God, Spinoza believed in His immanence. According to Maimonides the transcendent God has nothing in common with humanity, is impersonal and inaccessible to men. Maimonides in effect solved the paradox of transcendence versus immanence by choosing the former and rejecting the latter. Maimonides could not accept that God can be remote as well as near simultaneously.

There is a similar situation in Hinduism, and it is expressed in the Non-Dualistic (Adwaita) Vedanta philosophy expounded by the famous Hindu philosopher Sankara (eighth century CE). According to Sankara, Brahman, the transcendent and immutable Reality, alone is real and the mutable world is unreal. For Sankara the phenomenal world appears to be real to common people due to ignorance. Although there are subtle differences between Maimonides' philosophy and Sankara's, there is no doubt that both of them placed supreme emphasis on the transcendent nature of the ultimate Reality and considered it as impersonal and aloof from the world.

Spinoza on the other hand emphasised immanence over transcendence. According to Spinoza God is identical with Nature, and has infinitely many 'Attributes', which include 'form' (thought) as well as 'matter' (extension). In Spinoza's view, God has no personality and does not rule over the universe by providence. It should be mentioned that because of his views about God, Spinoza was excommunicated by the Rabbis of Amsterdam. It also should be mentioned that Spinoza's views may be misinterpreted by many as pantheism in a very narrow sense. However, as Richard Aquila¹ pointed out, "Spinoza distinguishes between 'natura

1. Richard Aquila is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tennessee, and he made these comments in a personal correspondence with the author.

naturans' and 'natura naturata'. The latter is 'nature' as we more ordinarily think of it, including all natural objects and events. The former is the inner essence that is eternally expressing itself in all these objects and events. Arguably, it is best regarded as an infinite and eternal power: the infinite and eternal power of nature." Spinoza's 'natura naturans' is transcendent in a way, and it may be similar to Kabbalah's Eyn Sof and the Hindu Brahman. Kabbalah's Sefirot may be comparable to the divine Attributes.

Neither Maimonides nor Spinoza reconciled clearly the difference between the transcendent and immanent aspects of God, but instead accentuated the difference. It is the mystical traditions of Judaism that tried to reconcile the difference and solve the paradox, and in the following sections of this article I will examine the concepts of mysticism in general and those of Kabbalah focusing on the concepts of God. I also will compare these concepts with those of Hinduism. I should point out that by Hinduism I am referring to the philosophy of Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. I also will refer to the writings of Sri Aurobindo, who addressed the issue of transcendence and immanence of God in depth.

Nature of Mysticism

For a layperson mysticism commonly means concepts and practices that are esoteric and mysterious in nature. The interpretation of the hidden meaning of common rituals and practices also is referred to as mystical interpretation. For this article, however, I will not deal with these aspects of mysticism and will focus only on theological (metaphysical) concepts dealing with God and His relation with the world. Before examining these metaphysical concepts in Jewish mysticism a few statements can be made about the general nature of mystical theology.

A common criticism of mysticism is that the theological concepts presented by mystics are based neither on rational arguments, nor empirical evidence, and so these concepts are entirely speculative. To mystics, however, their views are based on personal experience and intuitive knowledge. A mystic relies on introspection and delves into his own consciousness to find answers to his questions about reality and truth. Mystics of all religions are known to practise contemplation and meditation, and they strive to go beyond the limits of intellect and intellectual logic. This personal or private aspect of mystical concepts is also open to criticism because mystical concepts cannot be verified by other persons unless they also are highly spiritual persons.

One important aspect of mysticism in general, which is different from traditional religious views, is the view of the 'interconnectedness' and 'oneness' of all that exists. This concept is related to the immanence of God in the world in a very deep sense and according to this view everything in the world is a part of and united in the universal

consciousness of God, who has become this world. A mystic sees God in everything and everything in God. These views of the immanence of God and the oneness of all that exists, which underlie the mystical tradition of all religions, are reflected in the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah, and we will examine these in the following sections.

Further, mysticism in general tries to overcome the limitation of ordinary human consciousness by recognising that the current state of human consciousness is not indicative of its full potential and true nature. Mysticism believes not only that man is created in God's image but also that he is constituted of the same nature or substance. According to mystics the true divine nature is hidden and covered up by ignorance and it is possible to remove the cover of ignorance by spiritual aspiration and practices. The goal of a mystic is not only to come near God but also to unite with the divine consciousness. The experience of mystics with regard to the exact nature of union with God varies. This union can be in the form of a total merger of the individual consciousness with the divine with the loss of individuality, or a union while keeping a separation. The latter type of union with a separation is called 'communion' in some contexts and 'cleaving' in Judaism. In Jewish mysticism cleaving to God is the highest goal. As David Ariel (2006, p. 150) points out, "because the theistic strictures of Judaism are so fundamental — the belief in the difference between the human and divine realms — Jewish mysticism is often constrained from pursuing absorptive and annihilative forms of mystical union". Cleaving to God is called *devekut* in Judaism. As Gilya Schmidt explains in an article, the nature and status of *devekut* have changed from period to period and from location to location; however, there is no question that the attachment or adherence to God, which is implied by *devekut*, is more than traditional piety. In Hinduism also different schools or paths strive to achieve different types of experience with God. For example, the goal of a follower of Non-Dualistic Vedanta may be the merger of his soul in the Ultimate Reality (Brahman), but that is not the goal of the followers of either the path of devotion (Bhakti Yoga) or the path of works (Karma Yoga). A follower of the devotional path strives for a loving relation of his soul with God, maintaining a separation even though he knows that he is a part of God. A follower of the path of works strives to become an instrument of God and do His 'will' by uniting his consciousness with God. Constant remembrance of God is common for both paths of devotion and works. The teaching of the Gita is compatible with the concept of *devekut*.

Origins of Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah

The traditional Jewish concept of God is similar to the traditional views of other religions. The point to note is that according to this view despite the nearness of God there is a real separation between man and God however small it may be. Man can

come close to God through prayer and other spiritual practices, but he cannot become one with Him. Further, although traditional Judaism believes that God created man in His own image and that man can purify himself from many flaws of human nature, it also believes that man cannot transform his own consciousness to become truly divine.

Jewish mysticism developed in different places in different times. The famous scholar of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem identified several periods of mystical movements within Judaism beginning with Merkabah mysticism in the first century CE (Scholem). The other mystical traditions include Kabbalah, and Hasidism. Our focus will be primarily on Kabbalah, which is perhaps the most well-known and popular mystical movement of Judaism in modern times.

Kabbalah does not represent the totality of Jewish mysticism, of which it is only one phase. It first developed in the thirteenth century in Southern France and Spain and subsequently went through several phases of development in different locations. Perhaps the earliest text of Kabbalah was the book named *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Book of Bahir) written in late 1100. An earlier book known as *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation) also contains ideas found in Kabbalah; however, this book is linked with the Merkabah mysticism, which preceded Kabbalah. The most influential text for Kabbalah is *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Book of Zohar), which was introduced in Spain in late 1200. The Book of Zohar was written by Rabbi Moses de Leon but it was based on an earlier text from the first or second century CE. There are several other famous Kabbalists who developed their own concepts within the framework of Kabbalah. Famous among them are Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria both of the sixteenth century. A detailed study of these different sources of thought within Kabbalah is beyond the scope of this article. However, there are a few concepts that are generally accepted by all schools within Kabbalah, and we will examine a few of these pertaining to the concept of God and His relation with the world, and how Kabbalah reconciles His transcendence and immanence.

Eyn Sof and Sefirot of Kabbalah

As discussed earlier, Maimonides took the concept of God to one extreme by presenting the aspect of transcendence only, while Spinoza emphasised the aspect of immanence. The Kabbalists' solution to the paradox of God's simultaneous transcendence and immanence was to introduce the concepts of Eyn Sof and Sefirot. I will discuss these concepts in this section and present similar concepts of Hinduism in the next section.

Kabbalists called the transcendent aspect of God, Eyn Sof (the Infinite, or without end). Eyn Sof belongs to the world of the infinite, is unchanging and unknowable. Kabbalah recognises that this transcendent aspect of God has no relationship with

His creatures and is not the proper object of prayers. The Kabbalist view of Eyn Sof is panentheistic.² Eyn Sof manifests as the universe and at the same time transcends the universe. In the transcendent status it is impersonal and immutable whereas in its immanent status it is the essence of the manifested universe. According to the famous Kabbalist Moses Cordovero, “All existence is God: The essence of The Infinite is found in every thing” (Matt, p. 24). Moses Cordovero also said, “God is everything that exists, though everything that exists is not God” (Matt, p. 24).

It is interesting to note that the term Eyn Sof has a negative connotation implying ‘no beginning’ or ‘non-being’. However, this concept of non-being is not nihilistic. The negative sense of the term indicates that the transcendent Godhead is beyond descriptions and concepts that can be presented by human language. It perhaps is more appropriate to describe Eyn Sof in terms of what it is not rather than what it is.

It is clear from this discussion that the concept of Eyn Sof alone does not explain how the transcendent God makes Himself present in all existence. The concept that helps Kabbalah provide the transition of Eyn Sof to the manifested world and thus bridge the distinction between the transcendent and immanent aspects of God is that of emanations. According to Kabbalah the world was created or manifested via ten emanations from God, which continue to sustain the universe, and these are called Sefirot. The emanations represent various qualities or powers, and before these qualities/powers emanated, they were utterly united with and concealed within Eyn Sof. Thus according to Kabbalah there are two natures of God — the infinite unknowable essence and the ten discernible aspects. The Infinite causes the Sefirot to emanate, and they in turn cause other stages of manifestation to occur. It should be pointed out that the realm, or world, of Sefirot lies above the manifested world and these powers act as the mediator between Eyn Sof and the manifested world.

The doctrine of Sefirot is at the heart of Kabbalah. The ten Sefirot in a specific hierarchy are also referred to as the Tree of Life. The role of each Sefira in the divine manifestation and the relation between these ten Sefirot themselves have been discussed by Kabbalah scholars in great detail; however, such an in-depth discussion is beyond the scope of this article. For our purpose it is important to recognise a few major ideas associated with Sefirot. The first Sefira, which stands at the head of the hierarchy, is called Keter, which means Crown. This is the first connection of the emanations with Eyn Sof. Some Kabbalists consider Keter as the ‘Primal Will’ or ‘Divine Thought’. This may be considered the Godhead of manifestation. The next eight Sefirot and what they represent are as follows: Hokhmah (Wisdom), Binah (Understanding), Hesed (Mercy/Kindness), Gevurah (Strength/Justice), Tiferet (Glory/Harmony), Netzah (Triumph/Victory), Hod (Splendour/Majesty), and Yesod (Foundation). Finally, all these powers are received by and channelled through the

2. Pantheism is the doctrine that believes the universe is God or is a manifestation of God. Whereas Panentheism believes that God is greater than the universe but contains and interpenetrates it.

last Sefira, Malkhut, also called Shekhinah, into the manifested world. It should be added that Malkhut (Kingdom), or Shekhinah, is of special importance since it is the direct linkage between the higher and the lower worlds. Shekhinah is considered female and represents God's presence in the world, and it is most readily accessible to mankind. It is important to point out that the qualities or powers represented by various Sefirot such as Wisdom, Kindness, Harmony, Majesty, etc., are embedded in individual human beings and to recognise the divine source of these qualities is an important task of one's spiritual quest. Some practitioners of Kabbalah meditate on the Tree of Life made up of Sefirot and visualise that the Tree is located in the human body (Goldwag, p. 115). According to Kabbalah the notion of a personal God can be applied to Sefirot, which are the object of human prayer. The concept of Sefirot has strong similarity with that of Divine Power (Shakti), or Ishwara-Shakti, of Hinduism and I will discuss this in the next section.

Comparison of Metaphysics of Kabbalah with that of Hinduism

The metaphysics of Kabbalah with respect to the concept of God and His relation with the phenomenal world is very similar to that of Hinduism. I will discuss in a comparative manner two concepts of metaphysics — the concept of the Ultimate Reality or Absolute, and the concept of personal God and His manifesting or emanating Power. First, Kabbalah's concept of Eyn Sof is almost identical to that of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality of Hindu philosophy. Brahman cannot be described and sometimes it is referred to as 'Non-Being', although it does not represent Nihil or Nothingness. The description of Brahman in negative terms, which is found in some Upanishads, is very similar to that of Eyn Sof in Kabbalah texts. Further, the Kabbalist view of Eyn Sof is panentheistic, and so is the Hindu view of Brahman. Brahman manifests as the universe and supports it as its Self, or Atman, and yet transcends the universe. In chapter nine of the Gita this concept is referred to as the supreme secret, and one verse may be quoted to present this view:

By Me, the Unmanifest Being, is all this universe pervaded. All beings are situated in Me and but I do not abide in them. (Verse 9-4)

Sri Aurobindo explains this verse in *Essays on the Gita* as follows:

This supreme secret is the mystery of the transcendent Godhead who is all and everywhere, yet so much greater and other than the universe and all its forms that nothing here contains him, nothing expresses him really, and no language which is borrowed from the appearances of things in space and time and their relations can suggest the truth of his unimaginable being. . . .

. . . All this mass of becomings always changing and in motion, all these creatures, existences, things, breathing and living forms, cannot contain him either in their sum or in their separate existence. He is not in them; it is not in them or by them that he lives, moves or has his being, — God is not the Becoming. It is they that are in him, it is they that live and move in him and draw their truth from him; they are his becomings, he is their being.

(Sri Aurobindo, 1976, pp. 297-98)

Simultaneous with the proclamation of the transcendence of God, the Gita also makes it very clear that the transcendent (higher) reality and the phenomenal (lower) world are constituted by the same principle and that the Spirit is the essence or seed of all that exists in the phenomenal world. For example, in Verse 7-10 of the Gita the Godhead (Krishna) tells His human disciple (Arjuna), “Know me to be the eternal seed of all existences”. So the question that arises is how does the mutable universe, the phenomenal world, come out of immutable Brahman? Hindu philosophy’s answer to this question is the ‘Consciousness-Force’ inherent in Brahman. According to the Upanishads, although the Ultimate Reality is unknowable, some of its aspects are knowable to the human intellect. The knowable status of Brahman is called in Sanskrit ‘Sat-Chit-Ananda’. ‘Sat’ is ‘Existence’; ‘Chit’ is ‘Consciousness’; and ‘Ananda’ is ‘Bliss’. These three aspects are always together although the prominence of one aspect may vary in different cases. The key to the manifestation of the universe is the ‘Chit’ aspect, which represents not only consciousness but also force. This consciousness-force, Chit-Shakti in Sanskrit, goes by different names in different systems of Hindu philosophy. In some systems it is called Maya while in other cases it is called Shakti. The Gita calls it Para-Prakriti or Supreme Nature. This Force is viewed as feminine and in some Hindu spiritual practices, e.g., Tantrism, this consciousness-force is worshipped as the Divine Mother.

It should be pointed out that Shakti is always supported by and coupled with Ishwara (God), the personal status of Brahman. Ishwara and His Shakti are not two different entities; Shakti is the power of Ishwara. Shakti is an aspect of Ishwara just as heat is an aspect of fire. For Hindus both Ishwara and Shakti are objects of worship and prayer.

The concept of Shakti or Mother-Force, and her role in the manifestation of the world is similar to that of Sefirot of Kabbalah. Sefirot represent many powers and qualities, which are manifested in the world and within human beings. Similarly the Shakti or Mother-Force too has many attributes or aspects. The Gita calls a divine power manifested in the world “Vibhuti” and devotes two chapters on the descriptions of various Vibhutis. Sri Aurobindo described these powers as divine forces in a booklet titled *The Mother* (Sri Aurobindo, 1974) in detail. Here I will present a few selected excerpts from his writing to show similarities with the role of Sefirot and their various powers or qualities.

The Mahashakti, the universal Mother, works out whatever is transmitted by her transcendent consciousness from the Supreme and enters into the worlds that she has made; . . . (p. 21)

. . . many are her powers and personalities, many her emanations and Vibhutis that do her work in the universe. (p. 19)

Determining all that shall be in this universe and in the terrestrial evolution by what she sees and feels and pours from her, she stands there above the Gods and all her Powers and Personalities are put out in front of her for the action and she sends down emanations of them into these lower worlds to intervene, to govern, to battle and conquer, to lead and turn their cycles, to direct the total and the individual lines of their forces. (p. 23)

Sri Aurobindo also describes four great Powers of the Mother, which guide the universe and the terrestrial play:

One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness. Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace. The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things. (pp. 25-26)

These four powers can be summarised as Wisdom, Strength, Harmony and Perfection. These are manifest in individual human beings in varying degrees. In certain Hindu spiritual practices the aspirants are urged to open their earthly nature to these powers for transforming the lower nature to higher levels.

Concluding Remarks

It should be clear from the discussion presented above that there are striking similarities between Kabbalah and Gita with regard to the concept of God. I have discussed the concept of Ultimate Reality — Eyn Sof of Kabbalah and Brahman of Hinduism. I have also presented how according to Kabbalah the transcendent Eyn Sof manifests the world by the powers of Sefirot, and how similar this concept is to that of Consciousness-Force, or Shakti, of Hinduism.

I would like to point out that Sri Aurobindo examined in depth the question of how to reconcile the difference between the transcendent Reality and the manifested world, and the riddle of how One can become Many without losing the oneness in his book *The Life Divine* (1973). He identified a specific medium or instrument by which the Divine Shakti manifests the world and he called it Supermind. A detailed discussion of Supermind is beyond the scope of this article.

I would like to conclude this article by emphasising the limited scope of the comparison between Jewish mysticism and Hinduisim, which it presented. There are other areas of similarities, which I did not explore. One of these is the concept of the stage-by-stage descent of Divine Consciousness into the material world and the ascent of a human soul to the Divine Source, which is expounded in detail by Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*. I also limited the scope by examining only one source of Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah. A complete coverage of Jewish mysticism must include Hasidism and the teachings of Israel ben Eliezer, also known as Bal Shem Tov, who was a highly spiritual person during the 18th century CE.

ARUN CHATTERJEE

References

1. Ariel, David S., *What Do Jews Believe?: The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism*, Schocken Books, 1995.
2. Ariel, David, *Kabbalah: The Mystic Quest in Judaism*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006.
3. Berg, P. S., *The Essential Zohar: The Source of Kabbalistic Wisdom*, Bell Tower, NY, 2004.
4. Cohn-Sherbok, Lavinia and Dan, *Judaism: A Short History*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, England, 1994.
5. Dan, Joseph, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2006.
6. Goldwag, Arthur, *The Beliefnet Guide to Kabbalah*, Three Leaves Press, Doubleday, NY, 2005.
7. Kurzweil, Arthur, *Kabbalah for Dummies*, Wiley Publishing Inc., 2007.
8. Matt, Daniel C., *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*, HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.
9. Schmidt, Gilya G., “ ‘Cleaving to God’ through the Ages: An Historical Analysis of the Jewish Concept of ‘Devekut’ ”, Published in *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 21 # 4, December 1995, pp. 103-120.
10. Scholem, Gershom, *Kabbalah*, A Meridian Book, Penguin Books USA Inc., 1978.
11. Sethna, K. D., *Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo*, Bharatiya Vidya Prakasan, Varanasi, India, 1973.

12. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India, 8th Indian Printing, June 1973.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India, 1974.
14. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India, 1976.
15. Werblowski, Zwi R. J., "Judaism, or the Religion of Israel" in *Encyclopedia of the World's Religions*, Edited by R. C. Zaehner, Barnes & Noble Books, 1997.
16. Zaehner, R. C., *Evolution in Religion: A Study in Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971.

Obviously, if material energies alone can exist in the material world, there can be no possibility of a life divine on the earth. A mere metaphysical "sleight of mind", as one might call it, could not justify it against the objections of scientific negation and concrete common sense. I had thought that even many scientific minds on the Continent had come to admit that science could no longer claim to decide what was the real reality of things, that it had no means of deciding it and could only discover and describe the how and process of the operations of material Force in the physical front of things. That left the field open to higher thought and speculation, spiritual experience and even to mysticism, occultism and all those greater things which almost everyone had come to disbelieve as impossible nonsense. That was the condition of things when I was in England. If that is to return or if Russia and her dialectical materialism are to lead the world, well, fate must be obeyed and life divine must remain content to wait perhaps for another millennium. But I do not like the idea of one of our periodicals being the arena for a wrestle of that kind. That is all. I am writing under the impression of your earlier article on this subject, as I have not gone carefully through the later ones; I dare say these later ones may be entirely convincing and I would find after reading them that my own position was wrong and that only an obstinate mystic could still believe in such a conquest of Matter by the Spirit as I had dared to think possible. But I am just such an obstinate mystic; so, if I allowed your exposition of the matter to be published in one of our own periodicals, I would be under the obligation of returning to the subject in which I have lost interest and therefore the inclination to write, so as to re-establish my position and would have to combat the claim of materialistic Science to pronounce anything on these matters on which it has no means of enquiry nor any possibility of arriving at a valid decision.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 207-8)

YUGAPURUSH SRI AUROBINDO

[The August issue of the journal carried an extract from Motilal Roy's reminiscences. This issue carries a few more pages from the same book.]

. . . I returned home (from Pondicherry) with a lot of political directions and secrets of sadhana gathered in my heart. After a few days he [Sri Aurobindo] wrote to me, "The situation here just now is that we have Re ½ or so in hand." . . .

On receiving his letter I was in tears. At that point in time I had some money in hand for my furniture business. I sent him Rs. 50 from that.

After a few days I received another letter from him which disturbed me very much. He wrote again, "I must ask you to procure for me by will power or any other power in heaven or earth (Rs. 50 as a loan)."

I was plunged in deep thought. My reunion with Sri Aurobindo had not been in vain. He could demand from me in this way only because he knew how near and dear I was to him. . .

. . . Henceforth I could manage to help him to have a decent standard of living, and I feel honoured for that.

. . . During 1912 and 1913 the revolutionary activities in Bengal continued in full swing under the able but secret guidance of Sri Aurobindo. Most of his letters were sent in 'code' language. We used to work accordingly. He always conveyed to me through letters whenever there was any problem regarding money or even political activities.

I came to know about his financial crisis in Pondicherry. Not only money, I even saw to their need for clothes. So I sent him some money and clothes very soon. He wrote, "Your money (by letter and wire) and clothes reached safely."

. . . Sri Aurobindo strongly believed in God since his childhood, something I have already mentioned earlier. In this letter too, he wrote humorously, "No doubt, God will provide, but He has contracted a bad habit of waiting till the last moment."

. . . I was very worried from the moment I heard about his hardship and began to think how to send him more money. One can't sit satisfied by sending him some clothes and money just once. I had heard that they required at least Rs. 75 per month for five people and Rs. 10 had to be kept for Sri Aurobindo's personal expenses. I was inspired to send this amount of Rs. 85 every month. My hope was fulfilled and after receiving the first instalment, he wrote, "It was a great relief to us that you were able to send Rs. 80 this time and Rs. 85 for March."

. . . To enable me to send him Rs. 85 per month, he asked me to see a textile merchant, Mr. Madgaokar, with his letter:

"I send enclosed a letter to our Marathi friend. If he can give you anything for

me, please send it without the least delay.”

Madgaokar was a non-Bengali gentleman. He had a textile business in the Burrabazar area of Calcutta. But he lived in Ballygunj. I found his house and met him. The first time, he showed me out, taking me to be a police spy. But he kept Sri Aurobindo’s letter with him. The next day, I went to see him again. This time I understood that he had gathered all the necessary information about me. Then he asked me in detail about Sri Aurobindo, how he had lived in Chandernagore and how he went to Pondicherry. But he didn’t give the money to me. He laughingly said, “Don’t think that I am not giving you the money because I don’t trust you. A lot of money sent to Sri Aurobindo has been lost through intermediaries — that’s why we have decided to send him the money directly, not by any other means. You can rest assured and write to him that I will send him Rs. 1000 through Grindla & Co. I returned to Chandernagore with a great sense of relief. I informed Sri Aurobindo about it and he in turn informed me that the money had been duly received in time. After receiving the money from Madgaokar Sri Aurobindo moved out of his old house and came to live in 41, Rue François Martin. . . .

It was impossible for me to know his actual needs. He asked for the money that was procured from the sales proceeds of Maniktola garden house. . . . His need for clothes can be gauged from one of his letters:

“There is the pressing cry for clothes in this quarter as these articles seem to be with us to remind us now constantly of the paucity of matter.”

To overcome this need for clothes, I would sometimes send some material too. Even after getting Rs. 1000 from Madgaokar, he could not be free from uncertainty. Whatever I sent him was still too little compared to what was needed.

. . . Around this time, Bepin Chandra Pal’s book *The Soul of India* was published. Immediately on receiving that book Sri Aurobindo asked me to send the book *The Master as I saw Him* by Sister Nivedita. He also asked for Romesh Chunder Dutt’s translation of the Rigveda. How he was preparing himself for a world-wide work behind his temporary revolutionary activities, was revealed in every line of his letters.

R. C. Dutt’s translation of the Rigveda was sent to Sri Aurobindo. He again wrote to me to ask for some money from Deshbandhu Chittaranjan. I went to him with Sri Aurobindo’s letter. Deshbandhu thought for a long time and then asked me to see him another day. On the specified day I went to him. He took out his then famous book of poems *Sagar Sangeet*, and said, “If Sri Aurobindo translates this into English, I will give him Rs. 1000 as remuneration.” On being informed of this, Sri Aurobindo asked for a copy of *Sagar Sangeet*. He translated the book in rhyming verse. Deshbandhu also paid him on time as promised. . . .

At the end of the (Durga Puja) festival in 1913, I proceeded to Calcutta. I had disguised myself to look like a ‘pucca sahib’. I had shaved off my shiny black moustache to change my appearance. Sudarshan Chatterjee, who was dressed as my orderly, saw me off on the Madras Mail. On reaching Madras, I went to the

house of my old friend Parthasarathy. But there was to be no rest for me because of my self-inflicted *faux pas*. At the platform in the station in conversation with a person, I had foolishly said that I was M. Roy, that I did not live in the Chunagully or Chowringhee area of Calcutta, but that Chandernagore was my native place and that I was a Hindu. This information had reached the police at lightning speed. In no time Parthasarathy's house was encircled by the police. Parthasarathy managed to smuggle me out through the back door and put me on board the train at the station.

When I reached Pondicherry in the wee hours of the next day, it had started raining heavily. I did not think it proper to go to Sri Aurobindo's house in that western attire. Srinivas Iyengar, Parthasarathy's elder brother, was residing there as a political refugee. I went to see him. Without wasting a single minute he took me to Sri Aurobindo's house. The detectives saw me, but taking me to be a foreigner they sent the information accordingly to the British Police office.

On entering Sri Aurobindo's house I met a Tamil youth whose name I learnt later was Amrita. He took me to Bijoy Nag. Afterwards, I met Nolini, Moni and Saurin, all of whom were known to me and my friends. Seeing my western dress everybody praised it, albeit humorously. Finally, Sri Aurobindo came out of the room. I knelt before him to touch his feet but my clothes came in the way. He took me in both his arms. . . and asked me, "Did you arrive safely?"

After listening to my ordeal, he smiled and said, "When you are coming secretly under the guise of a Sahib, you should have changed your name too! If you had the pride of declaring yourself a Hindu, then what was the purpose of dressing up as a Sahib?" I cursed myself for my stupidity. Now on his orders I had to stay with him for a month and a half; he did not permit me to go to Indo-China (as I had planned).

* * *

When we were living in Pondicherry, we used to shorten Sri Aurobindo's name and called him "Auro", and this we did with a lot of reverence and affection. This "Auro" was not a small person for us, his greatness still amazes us and we still feel it. During this period we used to spend all our time with him. After lunch he used to talk to us sitting in the verandah. To mould and recast our lives through Yoga in a new light — that was his purpose. Our discussions went on long into the night. We were unaware of how the night passed, and when the birds started chirping at dawn, we went to bed. What a rapturous love and affection, what a passionate urge to bind me in his chain of tenderness!

I was a vegetarian since my childhood. In Pondicherry I found that there was no arrangement for any other meal except fish and meat. The first few days I took only boiled potatoes with rice. Auro used to laugh at me, without malice. Moni, Bijoy, Nolini and others jokingly asked me, "How long will you go on like this? If you take

fish or meat will you become an outcaste?" But Auro never spoke anything. He spent his time in fun and humour during meals. But I understood his underlying attitude.

He inspired me to get rid of all old prejudices and superstitions. The words of Bijoy and others were just a pointer, it seemed. That very day, I announced during mealtime, "I am no longer a vegetarian from today. Whatever Auro likes, I will also take it." My comrades applauded my decision and said, "Bravo! — Auro has broken your superstitions, prejudices and rituals. From this evening you will be served sea fish on your platter."

So that was it. At dinner, I found a bowl of fish curry with rice. I broke with prejudice no doubt, but my soul cried out. Auro looked once at me. (His eyes seemed to say he sympathised with my condition.) But he wanted to remould me, free me from all my old beliefs. I looked at him and said, "I have become a non-vegetarian from today." He smiled. I got the support for my decision in that smile. That day, I ate my food all right but there was no satisfaction. After dinner he sat in the verandah and spoke extensively on the yoga of surrender. While listening to him I understood that all religions have to be given up to take refuge in the One. In fact, this time I had come to Pondicherry prepared for this.

One morning, the French Police Commissioner came. In Madras, I had gone to Parthasarathy's house with my bag and baggage, and had somehow escaped by a secret route when the police came to search the house. Now, I had entered Sri Aurobindo's house with Srinivasa Iyengar. It was perhaps at the behest of the British police that the local police had come for me. Nearly all my friends advised me to go away from the house and return only after the Commissioner had conducted the search and left. At this point Auro came and stood before us. He used to wear a dhoti and wrapped half of it on his torso. He had a pair of slippers on his feet. That calm and soothing look is unforgettable. He was rather thin but his eyes were exceptionally bright and his face was radiant. With a faint smile he asked me, "What shall I tell the Police Commissioner?" But I didn't have to answer; he looked at me for some time and then went down the staircase with a sombre look. He explained to the Police Commissioner everything about me. After listening to him, the Commissioner only asked him, "The gentleman who has come from Chandernagore, what is his relation with you?" He calmly answered, "He is my disciple." The Commissioner shook his hand with a smile and left. Auro came back to us and said, "Everything is over, you can safely stay with us now."

. . . My departure for Indo-China had been shelved. The moment I talked about bringing revolvers for my revolutionary friends he (Sri Aurobindo) said, "India will not awaken through Rajasic ways; a group of people in India will have to listen to the words of Gita's Parthasarathy. The leaders of India will be like the Gita's characters. They have to be 'Gunatita' (beyond the Gunas). Only then can India's freedom come. At this time he clearly let me know that henceforth I should not indulge in

any Rajasic Karma. He wanted to build India all anew. I also promised to follow his orders to the best of my abilities.

. . . I remember one day he was sitting on the balcony gazing high up in the sky — while explaining about will-power. He said, “Will is all pervading. See here, I will exert my ‘will’ and the kites will instantly change their course of flying.” Truly the kites flew away in the opposite direction the moment he ‘willed’ it.

When the day came for me to take my leave, he thought for a while before answering my question — how was I to go back to Bengal — and then said, “The manner in which you have escaped the eyes of the British police, they won’t let you go easily if they catch you. You have to go back secretly.” On his advice, I took the steamer of a French Company that ran a ferry-service to Bengal regularly.

MOTILAL ROY

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

This first pursuit of impersonality as enjoined by the Gita brings with it evidently a certain completest inner quietism and is identical in its inmost parts and principles of practice with the method of Sannyasa. And yet there is a point at which its tendency of withdrawal from the claims of dynamic Nature and the external world is checked and a limit imposed to prevent the inner quietism from deepening into refusal of action and a physical withdrawal. The renunciation of their objects by the senses . . . must be a giving up of all sensuous attachment, rasa, not a refusal of the intrinsic necessary activity of the senses. One must move among surrounding things and act on the objects of the sense-field with a pure, true and intense, a simple and absolute operation of the senses for their utility to the spirit in divine action . . . and not at all for the fulfilment of desire.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 534)

A PRINCE IN THE ASHRAM

THE first time I came to the Ashram I did not meet him.

But Edoardo did, the day before we left.

He told me he had been received by a real gentleman, refined and cultured, who had been a disciple of Sri Aurobindo since 1938 and who conversed with him both in English and in Italian: Kalyan Chaudhury.

He was Bengali.

Tagore, Rabindranath as he always called him, was a family friend and Kalyan had played the flute for him when a young boy.

He had hunted the tiger with his father and had learned to be still and fearless in the jungle so as not to attract the wild animal with the scent of fear.

He had been sent to England and to Italy, to Milan with Ing. Omodeo, to become an engineer.

But already then his inner being made him feel he must look for something else.

When still in the north of India where he was working after his return, he had the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, not knowing who they were.

He had arrived at the Ashram through his cousin, the poet and musician Dilip Kumar Roy, an early disciple of Sri Aurobindo. Dilip-da told him about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother during a visit to Calcutta in 1938. When Sri Aurobindo had seen his photo he told Dilip-da to ask him to come at once.

His brother had served in the Royal Air Force and had been killed in the battle of Britain. Seriously injured flying over Berlin he managed to return to England only to expire immediately on landing.

Another cousin, General Jayant Nath Chaudhury, was Chief of the Army Staff when he fought the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965. He had also liberated Hyderabad in 1948.

What with all this and the fearless jungle education, I was not surprised when Kalyan told me he and his family belonged to the caste of the Kshatriyas! A consonance with the teaching of the Gita!

His sister who visited the Ashram very often and later stayed there, had a beautiful name: Alokanda. Joy of paradise.

His work in the Ashram when I knew him was to supervise and organise the production of the paddy fields that fed the Ashramites. He had acquired some of the land himself for the Ashram: "New Paddy Land." He took me there sometimes in the white jeep he used every day, which was parked in Abhay Singh's workshop.

But apart from that jeep, he had the most surprising object in the garage next to his home: he kept a most beautiful sports car, a red MG! I had some rides in that as well.

He used to visit Dilip-da in Poona about once a year driving there from Pondy in his MG. There were robbers in the mountains he had to cross but against all advice he wisely insisted on going unarmed as he would never have used a weapon and it would only have encouraged them to do so.

He had built his upstairs room himself on the roof of Maison Dutt and once the Mother went to see it before there was any staircase. She had climbed the ladder and seeing the room she had said: “*Mais c’est la chambre d’un prince!*” (But this is the room of a prince!)

The Mother considered him a good tennis player and often asked him to play.

When I went back the second time I visited him and we became great friends.

When I went back the third time, and this is what I remember, I was walking towards the Ashram along the street where the Ganesh temple is. I had passed the temple and was nearly at the Ashram when I heard someone call my name from behind “Felicity!” I turned and was so full of joy that I threw myself into his arms in a rather disrespectfully childish manner. Or “psychic” as he explained later. At that moment he had promised himself and the Mother he would do all he could to help me in my yoga.

And he did. I had left Rome without telling Edoardo that the ophthalmologist had diagnosed a dangerous illness in my eyes again and that he had warned me not to go to India. So, when Edoardo’s alarmed telegram arrived the problem was presented to the Mother.

She said, “*Les yeux doivent voir avec la conscience divine.*” (The eyes must see with the divine consciousness.)

I had to wash my eyes in Blue Water, one of Pavitra-da’s formulas, which Sujata gave me in the “*Laboratoire*”, a room upstairs next to Pavitra’s room; (the Mother used to cross these two rooms to go to give Darshan from the north balcony); and no reading. That was that, I trusted Mother entirely.

How lucky I was: Kalyan offered to read to me. I went every afternoon for tea and reading. He gradually read to me some of the Upanishads, the *Gita*, parts of *Savitri*, but also Sanscrit texts, Bengali poetry. I had already read *The Life Divine* but his reading of the last six chapters was so enriching.

I learned about the great characters of the *Ramayana* and of the *Bhagavad Gita*. I learned about the secret of the Veda and Sri Aurobindo’s deep research towards its hidden truth.

But also I discovered the beautiful sensuality of certain Indian literature: the forests, the golden fruits, the flight of birds of paradise, the fleeting deer, the archers, the beautiful maidens, all symbol and reality of deeper adventure.

When reading *Savitri* I was not allowed to ask questions, he would not explain. He wanted it to penetrate me through another level of consciousness, where mind does not intervene. I had to silence my mind and let it flow.

Same with Sanscrit which I did not understand, but it was so beautiful and it awakened ancient echoes in me.

Already I had been told that the symbology of my dreams and experiences was Indian. I felt very much at home especially with the Vedic times.

Yes, it was in that period that I started having a lot of remembrances of what, I was told, were past lives, but I did not give much importance to all that as the present was so intense and interesting.

Kalyan's advice was always to look straight and exclusively towards the Mother in all circumstances. He was aware of my aspiration which was the unique energy leading me.

He used to have tea with Nirod-da early every afternoon in Nirod's room near the Samadhi. I was invited too a few times and those were moments of peace and stability even in conversation.

Once Kalyan invited Nolini-da to have tea with me. I was rather impressed and waiting for Nolini-da to arrive I suppose I wondered about what yogic subject I would be able to talk about. Well, it was great: Nolini-da arrived running, in his white shorts and a small towel round his neck, and sitting down with a smile and a twinkle in his eyes he said, "There, physical exercise is the most important thing." After that we laughed a lot, in a calm serene atmosphere, on the terrace of Kalyan's room.

At Darshan meditations the Mother had allowed me to sit upstairs and I sat next to Kalyan who was next to Nolini-da. We were so near to Sri Aurobindo's room and the rooms that had been the Mother's before she went to live upstairs.

With eyes closed one was taken into a calm intensity, conscious of being in something unique and immense.

Other disciples passed quietly to take their places and I remember the slight flutter of a sari or the soft footfall of bare feet on the carpets.

Then the gong sounded and it was silence and then power: that golden force inundated us as much as we could take in our silence.

Whatever the Mother said had profound echoes.

She had said of Kalyan "a prince" concerning his room. But he was a prince in education, vast and refined culture, character, but above all he was a prince in yoga, and a prince in the subtle spiritual plane beyond.

Yes, he belonged to the caste of Kshatriyas. He taught me how to stand and fight but also how to lose, how to stick stubbornly to the goal through all phases, the brilliant ones full of light and speed and uplifting, and the flat ones where nothing seems to move.

I admired his perseverance and his capacity to accept all with what for me was

an incredible endurance, like when he was obliged to leave his room and go and live downstairs in the darker rooms in direct contact with the crowd and noise in front of the Ganesh temple: the drums, the “*shahnai*” (trumpets), the beggars shouting; nothing like the peace in Sri Aurobindo’s room where he meditated. But the peace was in him, as solid and strong as a mountain.

Later, he wrote to me in one of his letters: “May your silence be always free of all that impairs the soul from recognising the Eternal Beloved who is the only object of love and adoration. A vigilant and wakeful silence brings the vision of Him spread everywhere. Silence makes one forget this foolish ‘I’ and ‘mine’, the impeding covering laid on this face.”

Yes, he was a true disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

One of the wonderful people I met in the Ashram.

One of those who have trod this same path through so many lives.

FELICITY

Pity is sometimes a good substitute for love; but it is always no more than a substitute.

Self-pity is always born of self-love; but pity for others is not always born of love for its object. It is sometimes a self-regarding shrinking from the sight of pain; sometimes the rich man’s contemptuous dole to the pauper. Develop rather God’s divine compassion than human pity.

Not pity that bites the heart and weakens the inner members, but a divine masterful & untroubled compassion and helpfulness is the virtue that we should encourage.

To find that saving a man’s body or mind from suffering is not always for the good of either soul, mind or body, is one of the bitterest of experiences for the humanly compassionate.

Human pity is born of ignorance & weakness; it is the slave of emotional impressions. Divine compassion understands, discerns & saves.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 497)

PRITHWI SINGH AND THE PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT

As far as I know the present 'Publication Department' room was originally a part of the first Ashram Library set up by Premananda under the Mother's direction.

In 1934 Prithwi Singh, my father, wrote to the Mother:

While I am here I should like to do some sort of work. I can take up the work of the classification of books in the library according to the method of Dr. Dewey whose book I have brought with me. A sort of arrangement in cards is also necessary. If you approve I can explain the method to Nolini-babu and if he thinks it is not too complicated for the average user I can take up the work quite gladly. In any case I shall try faithfully to perform any work that you may be pleased to give me.

In 1938, when Prithwi Singh settled down permanently at the Ashram, the Mother asked him to work in the Library. On 4th of June 1938 he wrote to the Mother:

Regarding library work . . . Parichand has agreed to work one hour with me in the morning from 8:30 to 9:30 and for the rest I am trying to do everything myself. Altogether about 2925 books have been arranged, labelled and classified and there would be another 500 volumes or so of English books still left to be done. . . .

For the classification he did as he had written to the Mother in 1934 by using the Dewey System — a decimal system of classification. He had got labels printed for that purpose and used to get paste from Harikant's 'Binding Department' situated in the main Ashram building. A small label was pasted on the book's cover, giving its reference number and a bigger one inside giving more details. Later on, in 1941, when I along with my sister, Suprabha, and Prithwi Singh's three grandchildren joined the Ashram, Mother asked me to help my father and also work with Mona for embroidering bedspreads for Golconde. She also asked her to help Kiran Kumari (who used to repair stoves, pens, clean the filters, water pumps, refrigerators, cut chit pads from used papers etc.) and also help Sujata. By the way, it was from our eldest sister, Sujata, that Suprabha and I had our first French lesson. The book was *French without Tears!*

The Library then comprised the present 'Reading Room' and the first part of the present Publication Department (upto the first door that leads to the courtyard). A partition separated the second part, which also opened onto the same courtyard.

The third part was the adjoining room. These last two were used as classrooms. In the third one, Pavitra-da used to teach mathematics to Mrityunjoy, Vasudha, Shanti Doshi, Mangatrai, Noren Singh, Abhay Singh, Sujata and Dayakar. In 1942 Muttayen taught French there to Sumitra, Amiyo-da, Kanak-da, Chimanbhai to mention a few and Sunil-da taught maths to Chhobi, Arun, Ashok Ganguli, Sumitra and perhaps to Debu. Later on, Suprabha too had joined the class. In the second part of the room, Tinkori-da and Biren-da used to teach English to some students. In the same room ‘*danton*’ (toothsticks) were kept for those who liked to clean their teeth from Neem twigs or twigs from other trees.

English and perhaps French books too were kept in the present Reading Room then known as the Library. Premanand looked after that part; he would issue the books and was extremely strict that they be returned on the exact date. Sometimes, if a book was misplaced, he would call me for I somehow had a gift of finding the missing book very fast. Sadashiv, and later on, Vasanti also worked with him.

The first part of the Library where father worked used to shelve all the vernacular books. There were many Bengali ones — story books, novels, as well as magazines etc. — offered mainly by Sadhaks and Sadhikas. There was a constant supply of books from Kolkata mainly from the Arya Publishing House.

The present Fruit Room was also part of the Library. There were glass almirahs full of ‘*granthabalis*’ of Bankim, Sharat, Trailokyanath and others. Mats were spread on the floor where Sadhaks used to read the daily newspapers. (The Mother named the room ‘Falsehood’). There was also a long open shelf where magazines, mainly Hindi, Bengali and Gujarati, were stacked. Each year these magazines were bound and later kept in the glass almirahs.

Tarapado Patro of Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir used to send books published by the Arya Publishing House, as most of Sri Aurobindo’s books were then printed there. Some were printed at Madras and from the end of 1949 or the beginning of 1950 a few major works of Sri Aurobindo were published in the U.S.A. Towards the end of 1949 the Arya Publishing House became ‘a distributing concern and no longer a publishing one’.

Prithwi Singh used to arrange the books in the Library, sweep the floor and perform other tasks as well. He would also type out Sri Aurobindo’s manuscripts. He had thus become an expert in deciphering our Lord’s handwriting and I too was able to read Him more or less easily. I remember seeing some of Sri Aurobindo’s manuscripts written in a beautiful handwriting and more than easily readable. He used to write ‘e’ in the Greek style.

Ila-di, Rani-di and others helped father temporarily in arranging Bengali books. Father had taught me how to arrange the books in the cupboards, aligning them with the help of a ruler. Later, Tehmi-ben, Leena-di (Rose and Anju’s mother) also worked with him for many years. Piloo, better known as Sutapa, also helped him, specially with the typing, preparing bills and maintaining accounts. Neel too was there for

some time. Later on, Suprabha, Shobha, Jaleshwar-ji, Sukhveer-ji, Mounnou, to name a few, worked with Prithwi Singh. I do not remember which year I stopped working with him nor when Suprabha began to work there nor till when.

During the war years (1939-45) it was quite difficult to get books from outside Pondicherry. Prithwi Singh, who with the Mother's Blessing started the Ashram Book Sales Department (of which he was put in charge) suggested that if our Ashram had its own Press, Sri Aurobindo's books could be printed before they went out of print. The opportunity presented itself and our Ashram Press was started in 1945. When India became independent on Sri Aurobindo's birthday on the 15th of August 1947 and Pondicherry still remained a French territory, it became even more difficult and quite time-consuming to import books. As our Ashram had its own Press, the ever growing demand for Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's books could be met.

When Sri Aurobindo's *Collected Poems and Plays* was printed in two volumes in the Hyderabad Government Press in 1942, (Nolini-da was the Publisher), Sri Aurobindo would write the name of the recipient and autograph the copies.

As far as I remember, it was from 1947 that Sri Aurobindo started to autograph his books for those who bought them during Darshan times. Father and I would insert a paper in the book with the name of the buyer and the books would be sent to Sri Aurobindo for His autograph and Blessings. The next day the books were returned and handed over to the buyers. If my memory serves me right, in the beginning Sri Aurobindo used to write the names but not later on when the numbers had increased enormously as well as our Lord's other work.

In 1952 a small part of the Ashram Library was shifted to the Ashram School and Mother had put Medhananda in charge of the Library which later on was shifted to the present building nearly overnight (in fact, in two days) — it was in November 1954, when the French administration ceased and Pondicherry became a part of India. The remaining part of the Ashram Library was then also shifted there (see *Bulletin* of February 1955).

Previously, before the sales section was started, Prithwi Singh not only looked after this part of the Library but also had some other responsibilities. He was highly educated, a well-known art critic and had a superb collection of paintings of renowned artists of Bengal, the first edition of Tagore's books and of other famous writers and a vast collection of magazines. When he came to the Ashram he offered his coin collection to the Mother and used to look after that too. Mother wrote to him on 6 January 1941:

The collection is indeed very well arranged and quite interesting. I am thinking of reserving a special shelf for it and then I will ask you to come and arrange the boxes on the shelf.

Later on, the coin collection was transferred to the Library and the Mother asked me to look after it. I did so for some years. Thereafter it was given to the Philatelic

Department and Noren Singh was asked by the Mother to take charge of that too. It is still there.

In 1936 Prithwi Singh had offered to the Ashram his personal collection of the Arya volumes.

As Prithwi Singh was well-read and very proficient in English, whenever any letter came to Sri Aurobindo asking Him about a particular turn of phrase or expression used by Him, He would often send the question to Prithwi Singh who would find out from dictionaries and encyclopedias kept in cupboards in the Reception Room similar usage by earlier famous writers or poets. As his eyesight was poor he would ask me to read out to him, and inevitably he would find what he was looking for and then send his answer to Sri Aurobindo. I think it was via Nolini-da.

In the course of his proof-reading of *The Life Divine* he had put a few questions to Sri Aurobindo regarding some rare or newly-coined words and received His answer in detail.

As Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's works spread, Prithwi Singh would receive many letters enquiring about business, about books, about the Ashram as well as questions regarding sadhana etc. He would generally send these last ones to the Mother who would go through them and return them after replying, mostly in the margin or at the bottom if there was place. Prithwi Singh would then dictate the replies incorporating Mother's answer and these were mostly typed by Suprabha who worked with him for many years. For the Bengali letters, he answered them mostly in English so that they too could be typed.

In 1949 he had began to prepare a glossary of Sanskrit terms from the complete works of Sri Aurobindo. He wrote to the Lord that he thought that it would take one more year to complete it. I do not remember when the work was completed.

As far as I remember, he used to look at all the proofs of Sri Aurobindo's books. Ranju-da also helped him in this task. Later on I would read out from *Savitri*, *The Life Divine* and other books and father would choose sentences from them for the New Year Diary which was printed in our Ashram Press.

Nirod-da writes in *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* (p. 36, 2000 ed.):

... we could not know what was being written, because, except for the sonnets, he passed everything to Mother. She received it as a gift from God and sent it on to Prithwi Singh for typing. Though his eyesight was bad, his typing was so neat and clean, done with such minute care, that Sri Aurobindo was very pleased with his work.

I would like to close these recollections of my father with something very precious that I remember. Sri Aurobindo said about him: “. . .without Prithwi Singh there would be no *Life Divine*.”

Addendum

SRI AUROBINDO'S NOTES ON CERTAIN ENGLISH TERMS OCCURRING IN HIS WORKS

dynamis — “Dynamis” is a Greek word, not current, so far as I know, in English; but the verb *dunamai*, I can, am able, from which it derives, has given a number of verbs to the English language including dynamise, dynamics, dynamic, dyne (a unit of force), so that the word can be at once understood by all English readers. It means power, especially energetic power for energetic action. It is equivalent to the Sanskrit word, Shakti. Philosophically it can stand as the opposite word to status, Divine Status, Divine Dynamis.

ineffugable — “Ineffugible” is the correct formation, but it has no force or power of suggestive sound in it. The “a” in “ineffugable” has been brought in by illegitimate analogy from words like “fugacious”, Latin *fugare*, because it sounds better and is forcible.¹

sublate — “Sublate” means originally to remove; it means denial and removal (throwing off) of something posited. What appeared to be true, can be sublated by a greater truth contradicting it. The experience of the world can be sublated by a greater truth contradicting it. The experience of the world can be sublated by the experience of Self, it is denied and removed; so the experience of Self can be sublated by the experience of Shunya; it is denied and removed.

Hegel could not have used the word “sublate” as he wrote in German. I do not know what word² he used which is here translated by “sublate”, but certainly it does not mean both destroy and preserve, nor in fact does it mean either. Being passes over into Non-being, so it sublates itself, changes and eliminates itself as it were from the view, becomes Non-being instead of being; but so also does Non-being, what was Non-Being passes over into Being; where there was nothing, there is being; nothing

1. Sri Aurobindo made this comment when the following note apropos of “ineffugable” was submitted to him:

It is a new word, like “dynamis”, introduced into the English language by Sri Aurobindo. It means inescapable, inevitable, not to be avoided. A similar word was used by Blount in 1856 with slight change of form — “ineffugible”. Etymologically it is an adaptation of the Latin *ineffugibilis*, from *effugere*, to flee from, avoid. (*Vide*. Oxford English Dictionary)

2. *Aufheben*, if that is the German word, must mean “to send” as the Latin word *subtollere* (past participle: *sublatus*) “to heave up and off, to throw”, from which “sublate” is taken.

has eliminated itself from the view. This, says Hegel, is not a mutual destruction by the contraries each of which was outside the other. Being inside itself becomes nothing or Non-Being; Non-Being or Nothing equally inside itself passes into being. They do not really sublimate or drive out each other, but each sublimes itself into the other. In other words, it is the same Reality that presents itself now as one and now as the other.

(SABCL, Vol. 30, p. 369)

(The above explanations are part of Sri Aurobindo's answers to Prithwi Singh.)

The Yogin puts himself into direct relation with that which is omniscient and omnipotent within man and without him. He is in tune with the infinite, he becomes a channel for the strength of God to pour itself out upon the world whether through calm benevolence or active beneficence. When a man rises by putting from him the slough of self and lives for others and in the joys and sorrows of others; — when he works perfectly and with love and zeal, but casts away the anxiety for results and is neither eager for victory nor afraid of defeat; — when he devotes all his works to God and lays every thought, word and deed as an offering on the divine altar; — when he gets rid of fear and hatred, repulsion and disgust and attachment, and works like the forces of Nature, unceasing, unceasing, inevitably, perfectly; — when he rises above the thought that he is the body or the heart or the mind or the sum of these and finds his own and true self; — when he becomes aware of his immortality and the unreality of death; — when he experiences the advent of knowledge and feels himself passive and the divine force working unresisted through his mind, his speech, his senses and all his organs; — when having thus abandoned whatever he is, does or has to the Lord of all, the Lover and Helper of mankind, he dwells permanently in Him and becomes incapable of grief, disquiet or false excitement, — that is Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 11)

WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY

(Continued from the issue of July 2009)

11. The Flower that Mother Gives

OUR sweet Mother was associated with many flowers and the Ashram gardeners grew so enthusiastic that they began to grow new varieties of flowers! Today it is a familiar sight to see an Aurobindonian telling a friend that she has planted the bougain villaea for ‘protection’ of her newly built house. Or another speaking of the Neem and how he loves the ‘spiritual atmosphere’ it generates, even when it is in a far-away corner of his garden. In my house, for the last sixty years, we have named the champa as ‘*Annai Kodukkum Poo*’ (the flower that Mother gives). And even today I have a special love for this flower because in it I see my own mother and our Mother.

This is how it came about. Long, long ago, I think it was in 1945, my father took mother, my brother Ambirajan and myself to Pondicherry. It was an exciting trip through and through. Father was by now well-known as the biographer of Sri Aurobindo. All I knew about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was what amma told me. They were rishis and if I helped her gather lots of *parijata* blossoms every morning to make garlands they would give me all that I wished for. But, for Ambi and me the train journey was the main excitement.

We were standing in a queue in the Ashram. At this distance of time it is all a haze except that father was always with Shankargauda uncle. It was uncle who gave me a flower to hold and which I was to give to the Mother when my turn came. What has remained in my memory as a very, very clear picture is the smiling face of father and Shankargauda, the latter saying something and amma standing shyly, with her face a little bent, her hands cupping a flower carefully. Later on I came to know that this was the champa flower and that Shankargauda had exclaimed: “Psychological Perfection! Fits your wife perfectly!”

From then onwards, the flower became ‘*Annai Kodukkum Poo*’ in our house which was surrounded by a huge garden that had several champa trees. If I plucked and brought some, amma would be happy and invariably start reminiscing about how Shankargauda had praised her. “Me, the unlettered, unaccomplished housewife to be associated with psychological perfection!” That was her way of thinking about herself, although all her life she never spared a moment from improving herself. The *Ramayana* of Valmiki and Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* were the divine instruments she used to sculpt herself with. It is thanks to her habit of getting drawn into memories that I am able to recollect a beautiful, Divine-inspired friendship.

Father had begun teaching in the newly-started Lingaraj College, Belgaum, in

1933. Around 1940, he had become well-known as a writer and was then engaged in writing a monograph on Indian writers in English. He wanted to write something about Sri Aurobindo as he had come across a couple of his poems. During a morning walk one day, he met Shankargauda Patil who was on the college's management. Since Patil had just then returned from Pondicherry after meeting the Mahayogi, father asked him whether he had any of Sri Aurobindo's poems. To use father's own words when he spoke of this incident to me:

After an enigmatic pause, Mr. Patil invited me to afternoon tea next day, and promised to help me in my endeavour. I duly paid my visit the next afternoon, and after tea and small talk, he brought a couple of fat volumes entitled *Collected Poems and Plays of Sri Aurobindo*, the two volumes covering about 700 pages, and printed very attractively by the Hyderabad Central Press and priced at Rupees 30. I was almost overwhelmed by this revelation and I saw there were poems from the early years in England to the latest and incomplete ones. There were also the two blank verse plays, *Perseus the Deliverer*, a full-length play and his verse translation of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasiyam* as *Vikramorvasie or The Hero and the Nymph*. Mr. Patil asked me to take the books with me and keep them with me for as long as needed . . . I set to work at once on my assessment of Sri Aurobindo and whereas I had originally intended to give a line or two, at the most a paragraph to Sri Aurobindo, now I devoted a whole chapter, 'Aurobindo Ghosh'.

My mother told me that father read throughout the night and seemed as one who had discovered a "*peria pudhaya!*" (huge treasure-trove). When he showed his article to Shankargauda for comments, Mr. Patil was delighted. He took the article with him when he went to Pondicherry for Darshan on 24th November. His happiness knew no bounds when Sri Aurobindo himself read the typescript, suggested some corrections and gave permission for its publication. The article was published in *The New Review*, edited by a Jesuit scholar from Calcutta. Now Mr. Patil kept encouraging father to take up the task of writing a full-length biography of Sri Aurobindo. Father says it became a routine for Mr. Patil to come to our house daily in the evenings:

Mr. Patil himself would quickly glance through the 3 or 4 pages I had typed that day, and take them home for being retyped treble-space by his excellent stenographer, Tatyasaheb. At that time Sri Aurobindo was finding it a strain to read close-typed matter and Mr. Patil therefore had my single-spaced typescript changed into treble-space to decrease the strain on his eyes.

This was when Parubai would accompany her father and take me to the balcony for playing. Even as I type this, the curtains of memory get drawn aside and I have a

clear picture of Paru in a white frock helping me (I was two or three years old then) gather hailstones! Once I asked my mother whether this scene which comes often to my mind could have happened. She assured me it did happen and Paru would happily play with me and help her carry the teacups to my father and her father. We would also go to their sprawling house (they were zamindars of Vantmuri I think) and I would go straight to uncle, and show him my feet and he would himself remove my shoes and socks (we would have walked the distance) and my father was very angry the first time it happened. However uncle silenced him and it became a habit with me much to the annoyance of my parents. Uncle was every inch a noble man. So was Paru's mother, a presence reminding us of Sri Aurobindo's words: "All in her pointed to a nobler kind." When we left Belgaum for good, aunty presented mother with a plate of auspicious things like haldi, kumkum and a green silk sari with checks. My mother wore it on special occasions and had it till the mid-seventies. "*Innikki Paaruvoda amma kudutha podavai uduthikkapporen*" (I am going to wear today the sari given by Paru's mother), she would say with a glow on her face. "I was so young those days, had no education nor rich clothes or jewellery, yet that great family treated me as a daughter of their house!", she would say, her eyes growing moist.

That is why I think uncle found the Mother's giving 'Psychological Perfection' to amma to be the most appropriate. His family had known her so well and even after he passed away suddenly, Paru continued to show the same affection. Father believed firmly that without Shankargauda's help he could never have become the biographer of Sri Aurobindo. It was uncle who introduced him to many disciples like Nolini Kanta Gupta, Dilip Kumar Roy, K. D. Sethna and Nirodbaran, taking him to Pondicherry. Thanks to him, father also had his first darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Sri Aurobindo went through the entire manuscript of the biography when it was completed and made marginal corrections and comments and gave his approval. His comments are now included in the volume *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and the Mother*. The biography, *Sri Aurobindo* was published in 1944. The publication was certainly a sensation for the many Aurobindonians all over the world. The book received uniform praise from the press and the public. Prof S. K. Maitra wrote to the author that the biography was more important to the world's future than the sensational victory of the Allies in the War! Within two years there was a second and enlarged edition. Father never forgot what he owed to uncle for all this.

Nay, more. Father was trying to make both ends meet by teaching when he had to move to Bagalkot. The Lingaraj College, due to a technical snag refused to pay him his salary for the three months of vacation. Father was not perturbed since "tightening the belt" was a way of life for my parents. One day, uncle turned up at Bagalkot. After sometime when they were discussing the possibility of writing a companion biography of the Mother, uncle produced two fresh one thousand rupee notes and gave them to father, who refused to take the money. Uncle's argument was that though he was on the managing committee of the Lingaraj College, he had been helpless and would like

to help father in his personal capacity. Father tried to be firm when uncle floored him: “This is not for you, but my gift for a beautiful family!”

Beautiful memories. What understanding, affection and all that is glorious and good in the human make-up! And amma telling me even as recently as 2006, and not for the first time either: “I had never seen a one thousand rupee note till that day, you could buy a whole house for that amount, still he placed it in father’s hands as if he was offering flowers!”

Flowers! What will we do with our lives if they grow barren of flowers? We would not be able to find an appropriate term for such gentle and significant gestures. Because of its special place in our family, I was always attracted to the champa tree and tried growing it in my garden. I live now in a house which has no garden but I am growing a champa plant in a pot. When it outgrows the pot, how am I going to manage it? I have no idea, for this is a huge tree with ungainly branches, and a pot will not hold it. But at least for the first couple of bloom-seasons, I hope I will have it around. I can always plant another!

In Chennai where my brother built a house with considerable garden space, his wife Prabha set up a rich garden. There was a diversity of flowering trees. Four champa trees representing a couple of varieties, always shedding flowers which were fresh for a few hours. It was a joy watching my mother going around with a walking stick and gently bending some branches to pluck a basketful of flowers and then get the maid to weave a huge garland for the sculpture of the Flute-player in the garden. I shudder with ecstatic memories remembering the dark-hued Krishna nonchalantly playing the flute, the garland of white champa, a striking contrast. Amma would remember again and again the first darshan when Mother gave her the champa and withdrew into a meditation. It was a great comfort for her to pluck the flowers and gather those which had fallen on the ground, for the flowers carried the memory of the very fair hand that gave her the blossom and the smile of love and protection that accompanied the gift. This made it easier for amma to bear the loss of her only son, soon after my father’s passing away.

Having got used to the name in the family, I have never been able to speak of the flower as frangipani. Why frangipani? It sounds so like a Hindi term, something like ‘*phirangee-paani*’, foreign-water! In my ignorance I thought so till my daughter disabused me of the notion. Fancy that, an Italian gave the name to this tropical blossom! It is also known as Plumeria and once again I associated it with plumes as those of a peacock, for sometimes a whole branch would be devoid of leaves but hold forward a bunch of flowers. Wrong again! My daughter Ahana says it has been named so in honour of a French botanist Charles Plumier who lived three hundred years ago and was a priest.

I have always a fascination for books and the Encyclopaedia that have information which is stranger than fiction. When I went in search of Plumier, there was a good deal for me to jot down. Apparently, there was a Roman Catholic religious

order founded by an Italian monk called Order of Minims. What does the term, 'Minims' stand for? I have no idea. Anyway our Plumier belonged to this order of Minims and studied botany with passion and would go out often on expeditions to America, West Indies and other places. Must have been a tireless worker. It seems he left behind thousands of drawings and descriptions of plants and animals. And in those days when there was no computer! He was revered so much that Peter the Great translated one of his books into Russian.

For us who are close to the global family of Aurobindonian inspiration, plumeria is invariably associated with the Guardian of the Service Tree, Narad (Richard Eggenberger). He has authored a book on the plumeria and is a former President of the Plumeria Society of America. I had the honour of meeting him once. I was somewhat awed, for is he not the great horticulturist whom the Mother herself entrusted with the care of the Service Tree in the Ashram? I need not have worried. He is a very gentle person and is passionately concerned with the propagation of plumeria. And a poet too. It was only very recently that I chanced upon his message to the Southern California Plumeria Society in 2005.

The message gifted me with a bouquet of all that I love. Lovely passages from *Savitri*:

Pure like the breath of an unstained desire
 White jasmines haunted the enamoured air,
 Pale mango-blossoms fed the liquid voice
 Of the love-maddened coil, and the brown bee
 Muttered in fragrance mid the honey-buds.
 The sunlight was a great god's golden smile.
 All Nature was at beauty's festival.¹

Then, there is a fine linkage of flowers with human aspiration. How the flowers murmur radiant messages from the Divine. He speaks of varieties of champa. It is all news to me as I have come across only five or six different shades or sizes. For me, a champa is '*Annai Kodukkum Poo*', a luminous symbol that helps to form a direct contact with the Mother. So there are so many shades? Nay more, says Narad:

. . .we are only at the threshold of what will come with plumerias. And there will be new dwarf forms with large flowers, new fragrances. There will be new colours. We have lavender already coming into the genetic pool and there will be purples in time. There will be flowers that will be much longer lasting. Eventually, somebody will splice a cold, hearty gene into plumeria. It is being done in so many areas already.

1. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 352.

This is slightly unnerving for me who has an unstoppable fascination for Sri Aurobindo's 'A Dream of Surreal Science'. Must we meddle with Mother Prakriti? But with Narad around, I feel safe. He says that working with flowers is only to beautify the earth further. So I am content. He tells us that the last of the 12 gardens of Matrimandir is the Garden of Perfection. And the flower chosen for it? The champa! For it symbolises perfection and the Mother herself has given the names.

She said the first garden would be the garden of existence, obviously our beginnings, the next garden, the Garden of Consciousness and then the Garden of Bliss, followed by a garden of Life, a garden of Light, and a garden of Power. Then a garden of Wealth, represented by water lilies and cactus, then a garden of Usefulness, then a garden of Progress, and finally the last three gardens; Youth, Harmony and Perfection. And she chose the plumeria to represent the Garden of Perfection. And when I began working with plumerias, I knew it was my flower. It was the flower that I would work with for the rest of my life . . .

Narad comes close to the Vedic *Bhu Sukta* when he says the earth is holy. "And we have to do everything we can to purify it once again, through our flowers and through the love that we communicate through these flowers." Reading this imperative conclusion by a dedicated soul who has dived into the Divine by his love of the plumeria brings the realisation that flowers are indeed very, very close to the Divine. This also makes me wonder how great scientists and poets have been monks dedicated to the Divine, wearing coarse habits and hemmed in by innumerable rules of discipline. But they have produced some immortal sections of knowledge. Especially in the world of flowers. I walk towards the portrait of my mother wrapped in her red, black and green Assamese shawl that was a special gift of Bhuvana to her grandmother. She would have been delighted to read Narad's message about her '*Annai Kodukkum Poo*'. And I smile to myself, remembering how she used to listen fascinated to my father's recitation of English poetry. I do not think she followed the thought much. But the little explanation father gave was enough and she would listen with meditative sincerity. Father's favourite was the Catholic renunciate, Gerard Manley Hopkins about whom he wrote a critical study. The poems were not easy to recite either, but it did not matter. We could be easily mesmerised by father's voice reading Hopkins as if he were singing soulful music!

Glory be to God for dappled things —
 For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
 For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced — fold, fallow, and plough;
 And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

Another Aurobindonian friend, Prof. V. K. Gokak would recite the poem in quite a different style, as if he were slowly walking in state into a Convocation Hall and then the conclusion, his eyes circling the audience:

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him.

My father's fascination for Catholic writers lay in his admiration for his own teacher, Jerome de Souza. All his life, Fr. Jerome's portrait was hung on the wall near his bed.

Where was I? Where am I now? Such is the mood of losing one's self when wandering in the archives of memory. Fr. Jerome's name has already taken me to the St. Joseph's College at Tiruchirapalli which he built with great care. They say every brick in the buildings of the College echoes his name. Monkhooood certainly brings people close to nature. I believe each Buddhist monastery in Japan has a lovely garden, for such is their love of cultivating a sacred space with the bounty of nature. The Pure Land Garden of Motsuji temple is a thousand years old! Another ancient garden is the Rinnoji, according to travellers. Long, winding paths to walk and gaze at the sheer beauty of it all, cultivated of course, by expert monks. Small tarns here and there with gleaming fish. And flowers everywhere. Our Mother's Japanese interlude has made us think and live with flowers all the time.

Very near home, I came across a priest of the Jesuit Order in St. Joseph's College who has spent several decades listing the flowers of South India. S. John Britto has published his findings in Tamil. This "excursion flora of central Tamilnadu" is one of those books I like to come back to occasionally. As I wrote in one of my earliest essays in this series, I have all the leisure to sit back and enjoy a book, if I want to. I do not think I would have had this daily dose of excitement, if I had chosen not to be a library-bird! One thought leads to another and now I must pull out this heavy book from the shelf.

What a variety of flowers page after page! Yet not a single drawing or photograph of any flower. The romance, however, is very much here in spite of its dull exterior, the mere recitation of names and descriptions of petals, stem and the rest. My eyes take in rapidly *Desmodium laxiflorum*, *Centipeda minima*, *Ficus bengalensis* . . . As my glances leap across the information in Tamil, I stop here abruptly. *Alamaram!* Whew! *Ficus bengalensis* is the scientific name for the very familiar banyan tree! The banyan which is so much part of our consciousness as Krishna's favourite, the Supreme who could sleep peacefully on a banyan leaf! Krishna the All-Beautiful, the Flute-Player of Brindavan, who walks into our eyes the moment we close them. Look, look at the dancing plume of peacock feather on his crown!

Like a circle drawn by bringing together the two ends of a string, the peacock plume gets me back to 'Annai Kodukkum Poo', the plumeria. Dr. Britto calls it the Pagoda Tree, and says that it is raised as a sacramental tree. I am not sure. It is true

there is a pagoda-shaped tree by that name but its shape is exactly like the Buddhist Pagoda, whereas the plumeria tree is almost ungainly in appearance. In Tamil Nadu they call it ‘*Malai-arali*’, the Oleander of the Hills. Perhaps it is because when we break a twig of oleander or plumeria, we can see the ooze of a sticky milky fluid. It is considered poisonous too.

I have not seen plumeria flowers used for worshipping Vishnu in temples, while oleanders are welcome. This is yet another mystery to me. Is it because Vishnu likes only honey-dripping flowers? The hymns of the Tamil Alvars on Vishnu frequently refer to “garlands made of honey-dripping blossoms worn by the Lord”. Ah, that must be the reason. The champa does not produce honey. A flower that does not produce honey? I have never been a student of science and this is certainly a sticky wicket. I dial Ahana who is in Chennai. “What is this? I read somewhere that the ‘*Annai Kodukkum Poo*’ does not produce honey. You lectured the other day in some meeting that it is the bees which come for honey to the flowers that pollinate them. How come this plant has survived without honey and is even abundant?”

Pat comes the reply. “It is self-evident, Amma. (Is it, I grouse to myself.) The moths do come to the flowers but go away disappointed. However, the pollen that has stuck to them when they searched gets transferred to other places.” “What, are they such idiots, they come day after day to the same flowers though disappointed earlier?” There is a dry chuckle over the phone. “They may not be the same moths. Or they may have abundant hope. Your *Savitri* is sure to have a passage about them.”

“Our *Savitri*”, I correct her with authority.

“Of course. You told me there are marvellous passages about insect life in the epic.” She is speaking softly, trying not to offend the aged lady who is sometimes quick to take offence at such details.

‘The Kingdoms of Little Life’, I breathe into the phone. Even as I replace the receiver with one hand, the other has opened *Savitri*. This epic poem is my plumeria, my champa, my *Frangipani*, the Flower the Mother has given to direct my life, a never-fading ‘*Annai Kodukkum Poo*’:

Instinct was hers, the chrysalis of Truth,
And effort and growth and striving nescience.
Inflicting on the body desire and hope,
Imposing on inconscience consciousness,
She brought into Matter’s dull tenacity
Her anguished claim to her lost sovereign right,
Her tireless search, her vexed uneasy heart,
Her wandering unsure steps, her cry for change.²

(To be concluded)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

2. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 134.

Addendum

A LETTER TO A FRIEND

Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry
24.7.50

Dear friend:

I have received all your letters. The previous one was read to the Mother and She said:

1. The candidate for Ph.D. from Bombay may be asked to revise her thesis. (I may suggest to you to give her as much encouragement as possible and guidance too to write as good a thesis as possible. I venture to suggest this because the Mother may like to see a good thesis produced by the student.)

2. There is no hurry about the 80th Birthday of Sri Aurobindo as that celebration will take place in 1952. You can deal with Motwani's requests for an article in this light. (I do not think his attempt is authorised.)

The extract from *The Spectator* was seen by Him. We all have liked it. Thank you very much.

I have enclosed herewith the letters of Dorothy Richardson. Amrita was kind enough in making several copies of it for all of us concerned.

You must have liked Mr. Munshi's speech at the Mumbadevi Sanskrit Vidyapith which is reported in *Hindu* of Saturday the 22nd July. Of course it is said by one who is a literary artist, a politician, an advocate of Hindu culture, a leader, but also one who has been a devotee of Sri Aurobindo. Anyway what is said is said well and expresses the genuine feelings. He did have an interview for about 40 minutes when he came here.

Your second letter also was read to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. So Ambiraja and Prema may fully be satisfied that their names and progress were heard by THEM. Hope this finds you all in good health. Here is a flower from the Mother.

Yours in the Mother
Shankargauda

AS THE WORLD RE-SHAPES ITSELF. . .

THE world re-shapes itself before our eyes! The ‘old’ persists but the ‘new’ is very visible and commands our allegiance.

The persistence of the ‘old’ is marked by sharp frictions, violent clashes, the hard restrictive positions held by cultures and ideologies. And, as a final countdown, there is the crumbling, the melting down of long established structures of those institutions that have made the world go round! . . . The world comes to a curious kind of standstills. . . .

And the ‘new’ grows in visibility and in strength in the midst of the scattered remnants of the ‘old’. What are the visible signs of the new? How does it manifest? How does it mark its presence in the world?

This ‘presence’ is of a unique kind. It is that of a ‘sensitivity’ of the human consciousness towards all that is wide and inclusive, easy and mobile. There is a flow of transparency that rubs the hard corners of our beings into a soft roundedness!

The younger generation carries this ‘presence’ of the ‘new’ in an unusual manner. How do we perceive it?

- The attraction to political ideology is giving place to a sense of what is ‘human’. The specific shades are less important.
- Money and success count but as means to self-fulfilment — through self-expression and creativity — not as ends in themselves. The fixity ingrained in hoarding and accumulation is giving place to mobility in usage. . . . to a sense of sharing and circulation.
- The sense of specific religions, in the contours of differences, is making way for a kind of ‘spiritual sensitivity’ . . . embedded in life itself and shared by all beings. A ‘sensitivity’ that is a ‘fact of consciousness’ and not a matter of religious adherence . . . a ‘sensitivity’ which all human beings share and which unites but does not separate.
- The diversity of human cultures, of ways of being and living and acting, are a source of richness and signs of the manifoldness of life. There is a seeking for the experience of this diversity — through travel, communication, edu-

cation and work . . . and relationships — to enrich ourselves and to make ourselves ‘whole’, instead of being restricted by the sole culture of our birth.

- A new kind of personality is taking shape . . . that seeks to become ‘whole’ through an experience of cultural and psychological diversity. And it holds the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘material’ in life in one flow of continuity as elements essential to one another. This is happening in all countries of the world. This personality is not country-specific but is a global occurrence. And the young connect with one another effortlessly across the specific culture-resonances! As though, it were a new ‘species’ almost that is emerging in the evolutionary scale!
- The structures of life and work that this generation starts to create are, in nature, inter-penetrative, of a wide networking, supple and mobile, multi-dimensional. Change and a sense of continuous progression are the rails on which the structures roll.
- But even as the ‘new’ grows in strength and visibility, the old persists as the interface . . . with much violence and a great difficulty of transition. A kind of relatability between the two, a certain smoothness of transition, is not there. We remember a few words of the Mother which are deeply significant:

“Sri Aurobindo used to say: it is woman that can build a bridge between the old world and the supramental world.”¹

The new world carries the signs of the growing presence of the ‘*supramental*’ . . . in its movement towards a fuller manifestation. And women carry the great responsibility of becoming conscious of this transition, of this passage into the ‘new’ that is taking place. To be conscious . . . and to seek to be part of this process.

Women have the power of ‘transmission’ which is a quality of the energy-field that is theirs. The power to retain, to ‘hold’ . . . is that of the Purusha Consciousness. But the power to ‘transmit’ and, further, to ‘transmute’ . . . this belongs to the consciousness of Shakti.

From the human to the divine — these are the steps of our journey. The woman, as the human being . . . to transcend the external personality and become the receptacle of the force of the Divine. The Force that, by its action, can bridge the gulf between

1. In a conversation with a disciple on 26 April 1972.

the old and the new world . . . and can manifest the ‘new’ in the face of the resistances offered by the ‘old’.

As our world re-shapes itself, women have to be very consciously part of this re-shaping. Their conscious energy carries the power of Love that alone can transmute and re-create. A many-sidedness of effort, a suppleness of movement and action are the other attributes of great significance.

Such is the need of the hour and this is the action called for.

ASTER PATEL

“Why are women’s records not announced?”

We have, I believe, repeated and reiterated that there are no “women’s” and no “men’s” records, there are only group records. There is the green group — the various green groups — there is the red group, the grey group, the blue group, the khaki group, the white group. You may tell me that some of these groups are exclusively men’s or women’s. I shall answer what I have just said, that unless one comes here very young, it is difficult to change one’s habits, and that is what has made this separation necessary — but it is not the ideal. And if we made it a habit to announce gloriously: “This very remarkable girl has done what no other girl could do before”, oh, là, là, what a fall it would be! Not to mention that this encourages vanity — which is not good — it is also an assertion that this fact is remarkable because it is a girl; now it is not at all a remarkable fact that it is a girl: it is remarkable because she has done very well, and there are many boys who have not done so well. But if one wants to magnify this fine fact by comparing her with other girls who have not done as well, it becomes deplorable.

So this question was brought to me. I believe that person has been given the answer which I have just told you, that there are only group records and no records of sexes.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1956, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 8, pp. 238-39)

A BOOK FOR CHILDREN OF 3 TO 103

A LITTLE book, *Travels of the Psychic Being* by Claire and Namah (published by Marie-Rose and Claire Le Touze, Auroville Press, Rs. 315) has just come out as though in answer to a prayer of Auroville's Psychic Being.

It explains indirectly through words, and directly through luminous illustrations of an ever-smiling being in the heart centre, the eternal divine spark that is our true self which, life after life, under one name and then another, comes to earth to learn before going to its rest. Then it returns again and again until all the work is done. After many lives "Sacha" and "Salila" no longer have to return in the bodies of babies. Their bodies of light have become so strong that they can just land on earth, to spread light everywhere. That is now their work. Now there is no shadow, no night, no need for rest, no forgetting what one has been, no suffering, only joy.

But first, before this being of joyful light can achieve this there are many lives to go through for:

When the little Psychic Being finishes resting
He has to come back to Earth
But on Earth
He needs a physical body to walk and run
He needs a life body to have energy to laugh, to play and to work
He needs a mind body to see, to learn and to understand

These three bodies are just instruments of the Psychic Being
For Him to grow and to create the Life Divine

But always, these three bodies want to do only what they want:
The physical body wants to rest
Then the life body wants to laugh with his friends
And the mind body wants to read

Oh! là, là! There is such confusion! *C'est la panique!*
But one day, the physical body, the life body and the mind body come to agree!
The Psychic Being has become very strong
The three bodies listen to it and follow its movement
And there, always, there is a Delight
It is harmony
The Divine grows in humankind
The Divine prepares His world

Thus, simply, a child's conflicts and their purpose are made clear to him.

The candid words and illustrations for children are accompanied discreetly in cursive print by quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for the children of 103.

No school can afford to be without this book nor any parent. It answers the questions that children often ask but even more the questions the children don't know how to ask.

It is for all ages but it is very specially for children stepping out of their magical light world into a world of logic and calculation, at about 7 years. It helps them keep in touch with their light centre which almost inevitably goes into the background at this stage.

And for others, it reconnects them to their own light and joy, and for yet others, it introduces them to a world of which they have been almost unaware but which was waiting within them. The fact is that we all, as we move into adulthood, largely leave a world of psychic sensitivity behind. As we learn in our geography classes about the spaces on the world map, our inner spaces seem to shrink, we learn that if I have 4 apples and give away 3, I am left with one and we lose the association of joy that goes with giving, and the connections of the apple's colour and fragrance. We come at birth into the world trailing clouds of glory as Wordsworth reminds us, half-remembering the psychic world from which we come, but gradually it is lost to us unless we are reminded of it.

Most children remember their provenance up to a certain age. In a book, *Babies Remember Birth* (I can't remember the author)¹ numerous cases are cited in which very small children babble about the way Doctor slapped harder than necessary because he was in a bad mood that day, about how Father was disappointed because it was a girl, about how Granny had a fight with Mama about keeping the baby in the hospital ward instead of beside her bed. They find themselves rudely shaken out of their world of psychic rest. By the time the child can formulate all this clearly he senses without being told that there are things which don't belong in the world of "big people". There are a lot of things they don't care to hear about, which make them uncomfortable, which make them say "That is nonsense!"

Oscar, Mother's Swiss disciple to whom she entrusted *The Auroville Gazette* in the early days, records in his 'Experiences in yoga' (*How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, Vol. 3 by Shyam Kumari):

I can vividly recall spiritual experiences of my early childhood when I was, so to say, on speaking terms with God, something which appeared quite natural to me at that time. While lying awake on my bed the notion of physical space sometimes disappeared; that is, the space between me and the opposite bed-

1. [*Babies Remember Birth*, by David Chamberlain, Ph.D., (Los Angeles, Tarcher, 1988).]

room wall seemed to vanish, exactly as it had done in my experience of 10th November 1964. But this change in the usual perception of space made me uneasy and I never spoke about it to anybody. I also had the impression, at times, that the “doors” of my throat were open and therefore put a towel or thin pillow on my throat before going to sleep, so that nobody unauthorised could enter. At other times I would get a strange sensation at the bottom of my spine, as if a lid had been removed there and a force from below started pushing itself up. Alas, there was nobody to tell me that there are seven subtle psychological centres in the body and that the most powerful energy centre at the bottom of the spine had been activated. At school age these experiences stopped although they still remain vivid in my memory. I can even recall small details such as the noises of the surroundings.

It took the next twenty-five years of my life (of which the last seven were spent in intense spiritual work and discipline) to rediscover this experience again. How much suffering, frustration, neurotic behaviour (I became one of those young rebels) and loss of precious time could have been avoided if I had had access in my childhood to somebody with knowledge of the inner worlds!

What can be done about keeping the child’s experience fresh and whole while leading him gently into the world of 2+2 and 6x8 and the elementary laws of matter if he is not to remain mentally undeveloped and a danger to himself and others?

This seems to be the most crucial step in a child’s development and education, the most delicate stage. It is a sort of balancing act that has to be supervised with understanding, and tact for the being has to stand in two worlds at the same time and for this the “big person” who guides has not to have lost touch with the magic of his own childhood and his psychic being. He too has to stand in two worlds. If a child can move into his teens without his having lost touch with the spaces of his soul we have the makings of a new sort of adult, someone who will be stronger not weaker than the child who has grown a shield between himself, his outer career self, and his inner world.

For the psychic being is in fact invulnerable in the sense that it can be tapped at any moment, in any circumstance, for unerring guidance. As the Mother tells us it is the only completely safe way. All paths can be dangerous, but the psychic path never.

Many small children are in touch with invisible worlds and nature spirits but because of their limited vocabulary they sometimes seem to talk nonsense. The parents may feel they are recording dreams or nightmares.

Children often see themselves as heroes and heroines of impossible feats, rescuing beleaguered children, liberating prisoners, slaying dragons, doing great deeds. Mother warns us not to discourage them. In these fantasies live the seeds of future greatness. Of herself she says she felt when still a small child that she had to accomplish a grand project. She did not know what it was but the certainty was there.

There is nothing worse than to encapsulate a child in a cocoon of common sense whose limitations are often stifling of his true abilities. It can take years to find one's "way back". (You'll be surprised at the answers once this area has been activated.) So how are we to keep the awareness of the psychic being alive while proceeding with the mind's development. The big person has to delve into his own childhood and encourage the children to speak, with such questions put as "Does anybody remember . . ."

It should be explained to children that their true beings have chosen exactly the circumstances of their birth, certainly those who are in Auroville and the Ashram must have been conscious enough to do this. Generally the choice of parents is made before conception. This makes it easier for children to deal with the difficulties of life. The modern world provides wonderful opportunities of many kinds for children but none of these can obviate the inevitable pains and frustrations that children meet on their life journey. If children know that these things, painful as they are, are part of the lessons they chose to learn in this life, much of the suffering can be avoided. In fact, this book was prompted by a kindergarten child's question about death.

Here, as in all else it is the contact with the psychic being which can help. Instead of being overwhelmed by a cruel fate he can understand to some extent the part that unwanted events have in the learning process of life. Children seldom speak about these things to their teachers. And often not to their parents. And as Oscar says, it can make them self-defeating rebels. The held-in frustrations can come out in resentment, sadness or partial withdrawal.

I have written a book about the true story of John Kelly, a one-time Aurovilian, in *Great Sir and the Heaven Lady*. As a small boy John Kelly, a Brooklyn Irish American was not only in touch with his psychic being, he used to see and speak to Sri Aurobindo and Mother, his heavenly parents, about which he never spoke to anybody. At school-going age he had to ask them not to visit him anymore. They interfered with his other activities. They obligingly "withdrew". It took the acute suffering of his World War II French warfare experience in which he saw nearly all of his buddies killed to re-activate his contact with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who then guided him through the war. So thank you Marie-Rose, Namah, and Claire for the much needed contribution of your book.

We need more books in this genre.

MAGGI