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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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TO THE GANGES

Hearken, Ganges, hearken, thou that sweepst golden to the sea,
Hearken, Mother, to my voice.
From the feet of Hari with thy waters pure thou leapest free,
Waters colder-pure than ice.

On Himaloy's grandiose summits upright in his cirque of stones
Shiva sits in breathless air,
Where the outcast seeks his refuge, where the demon army moans,
Ganges erring through his hair.

Down the snowwhite mountains speeding, the immortal peaks and cold,
Crowd thy waves untouched by man.
From Gungotry through the valleys next their icy tops were rolled,
Bursting through Shivadry ran.

In Benares' stainless city by defilement undefiled
Ghauts and temples lightly touched
With thy fingers as thou ranst, laughed low in pureness like a child
To his mother's bosom clutched.

Where the steps of Rama wandered, where the feet of Krishna came,
There thou flowest, there thy hand
Clasps us, Bhagirathie, Jahnavie or Gunga, and thy name
Holier makes the Aryans' land.

But thou leavest Aryavurtha, but thou leapest to the seas
In thy hundred mighty streams;
Nor in the unquiet Ocean vast thy grandiose journeyings cease,
Mother, say thy children's dreams.

Down thou plungest through the Ocean, far beneath its oozy bed
In Patala's leaden gloom
Moaning o'er her children's pain our mother, Ganges of the dead,
Leads our wandering spirits home.

Mighty with the mighty still thou dwelledst, goddess high and pure;
Iron Bhishma was thy son,

Who against ten thousand rushing chariots could in war endure;
 Many heroes fled from one.

Devavrath the mighty, Bhîshma with his oath of iron power,
 Smilingly who gave up full
 Joy of human life and empire, that his father's wish might flower
 And his father's son might rule.

Who were these that thronged thereafter? wherefore came these puny hearts
 Apter for the cringing slave,
 Wrangling, selfish, weak and treacherous, vendors of their nobler parts,
 Sorry food for pyre and grave?

O but these are men of mind not yet with Europe's brutal mood alloyed,
 Poets singing in their chains,
 Preachers teaching manly slavery, speakers thundering in the void.
 Motley wear these men of brains!

Well it is for hound and watchdog fawning at a master's feet,
 Cringing, of the whip afraid!
 Well it is for linnet caged to make with song his slavery sweet.
 Man for other ends was made.

Man the arrogant, the splendid, man the mighty wise and strong,
 Born to rule the peopled earth,
 Shall he bear the alien's insult, shall he brook the tyrant's wrong
 Like a thing of meaner birth?

Sreepoor in the east of Chand and Kédar, bright with Mogul blood,
 And the Kings of Aracan
 And the Atlantic pirates helped that hue, — its ruined glory flood
 Kîrtinasha's waters wan.

Buried are our cities; fallen the apexed dome, the Indian arch;
 In Chitore the jackals crowd:
 Krishna's Dwarca sleeps for ever, o'er its ruined bastions march
 All the Oceans thundering loud.

Still, yet still the fire of Kali on her ancient altar burns
 Smouldering under smoky pall,
 And the deep heart of her peoples to their Mighty Mother turns,
 Listening for her Titan call.

Yet Pratapaditya's great fierce spirit shall in might awake
 In Jessore he loved and made,
 Sitaram the good and mighty for his well-loved people's sake
 Leave the stillness and the shade.

And Bengal the wide and ancient where the Senas swayed of old
 Up to far Benares pure,
 She shall lead the Aryan peoples to the mighty doom foretold
 And her glory shall endure.

By her heart of quick emotion, by her brain of living fire,
 By her vibrant speech and great,
 She shall lead them, they shall see their destiny in her warm desire
 Opening all the doors of Fate.

By the shores of Brahmaputra or where Ganges nears the sea,
 Even now a flame is born
 Which shall kindle all the South to brilliance and the North shall be
 Lighted up as with the morn.

And once more this Aryavurtha fit for heavenly feet to tread,
 Free and holy, bold and wise,
 Shall lift up her face before the world and she whom men thought dead,
 Into strength immortal rise.

Not in icy lone Gungotry nor by Kashi's holy fanes,
 Mother, hast thou power to save
 Only, nor dost thou grow old near Sagar, nor our vileness stains,
 Ganges, thy celestial wave.

Dukkhineswar, Dukkhineswar, wonderful predestined pile,
 Tell it to our sons unborn,
 Where the night was brooding darkest and the curse was on the soil
 Heaviest, God revealed the morn.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 256-59)

THE KARMAYOGIN

A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad

(Continued from the issue of November 2010)

Part II

Karmayoga; the Ideal

Chapter IV

The Eternal in His Universe

I. Eternal Truth the Basis of Ethics

I

The Root of Ethical Ideals

Chapter III. Psychical evolution — downward to matter

IN their enquiry into the spiritual nature of man the ancient thinkers and Yogins discovered that he has not only three spiritual states but three bodies or cases of matter corresponding to the spiritual states. This was in accordance with the nature of phenomenal existence as determined by their inquiries. Spirit and matter, the inner inspiring presence and outward acting substance-energy, are the two necessary terms of this existence. When phenomena are transcended we come to a Self independent of Spirit or Matter; but the moment Self descends into phenomenal existence, it must necessarily create for itself a form or body and a medium in which it manifests and through which it acts. Directly, therefore, the pure transcendent Self evolves one aspect of itself as a definable spiritual condition, it must in the nature of things evolve also a form or body and a medium through and in which Spirit in that condition can manifest itself. Matter, in other words, evolves coevally and coincidentally with Spirit. As soon as the Sleep-State appears, Spirit surrounds itself with matter in that most refined & least palpable condition, to which the name of causal matter may be given, — the material seed state, single and elemental in its nature, from which the material universe is evolved. With the evolution of the Dream-State matter also evolves from the causal into the subtle, a condition compound, divisible and capable of definite form but too fine to be perceived by ordinary physical senses. It is only when the Waking-State is evolved that matter concentrates into that gross physical condition which is all that Science has hitherto been able to analyse and investigate.

In man also as in the larger Cosmos each spiritual State lives in and uses its corresponding medium of matter and out of that matter shapes for itself its own body or material case. He has therefore a causal body for his Sleep-State or causal self, a subtle body for his Dream-State or psychical self and a gross body for his Waking-State or physical self. When he dies, what happens is simply the disintegration of the physical body and the return of the Waking into the Dream-State from which it was originally projected. Death, in the ordinary view, is a delivery from matter; body is destroyed and only spirit or soul remains: but this view is rejected by Hindu philosophy as an error resulting from confused and inadequate knowledge of man's psychical nature. The Waking-State having disappeared into the Dream-State and no longer existing, the physical body must necessarily disintegrate since it has no longer a soul to support it and keep naturally together the gross material atoms out of which it is constructed. But because the physical body is destroyed or dropped off, it does not follow that no body is left. Man goes on existing after death in his Dream-State and moves & acts with his subtle body; it is this dream-state in the subtle body to which the name soul or spirit is popularly given. Even the disintegration of the subtle body and the return of the Dream-State into the Sleep-State from which it was projected, would not imply a release from all restrictions of matter; for the causal body would still remain. It is only when the Sleep-State is also transcended, that phenomenal existence with its necessary duality of Spirit-Matter is left behind and transcended. Then spirit & body are both dissolved into pure and transcendent self-existence.

In examining and analysing these spiritual conditions in their respective bodies the Rishis arrived at a theory of psychical evolution contained within and dependent on the spiritual evolution already described. The basis of psychical as of spiritual existence is the pure Self called the Paramatman or Supreme Self when it manifests in the Cosmos and the Jivatman or individual Self when it manifests in man. The Self first manifests as Will or as the Rishis preferred to call it Ananda, Bliss, Delight. Ananda is the pure delight of existence and activity and may be identified in one of its aspects with the European Will-to-live, but it has a double tendency, the Will to be phenomenally and the Will to be transcendently, the Will to live and the Will to cease from phenomenal life. It is also the Will to know and the Will to enjoy and in each aspect the double tendency is repeated. The Will to know eternal reality is balanced by the Will to know phenomenal diversity; the Will to absolute delight by the Will to phenomenal delight. Will must be clearly distinguished from volition which is only one of the operations of Will acting in phenomena. The impacts from external things upon the mind result in sensations and the reactions of the Will upon these sensations when conveyed to it, take the form of desires. Volition is simply the impulse of the Will operating through the intelligence to satisfy or curb the desires created in the medium between itself and the mind. But the Will itself is antecedent to mind and intelligence and all the operations of body, mind and

intelligence are ultimately operations of material energy ordained by the Will. Self manifesting as Will or Bliss is, spiritually, the Sleep-State and operates absolutely & directly in the Causal body as the creative force behind Nature, but indirectly & under limitations in the subtle & gross bodies as the cause of all thought, action and feeling.

The next evolutionary form of Will, put forth by itself from itself as an instrument or operative force in the creation of the worlds, is Buddhi or Supra-intelligence, an energy which is above mind and reason and acts independently of any cerebral organ. It is Will acting through the Supra-intelligence that guides the growth of the tree and the formation of the animal and gives to all things in the Universe the appearance of careful and abundant workmanship and orderly arrangement from which the idea of an Almighty Artificer full of fecund and infinite imaginations has naturally grown up in the human mind; but from the point of view of the Vedanta Will and Supra-Intelligence are not attributes of an anthropomorphic Deity endowed with a colossal brain but aspects of a spiritual presence manifesting itself cosmically in phenomenal existence. Will, through Buddhi, creating and operating on phenomena in subtle matter evolves Mind, which by reception of external impacts & impressions evolves sensation; by reaction to impressions received, evolves desire and activity; by retention of impressions with their reactions, evolves memory; by coordination of impressions & reactions memorized, evolves the sense of individuality; by individual arrangement of impressions and reactions with the aid of memory evolves understanding; and by the action of supra-intelligence on developed mind evolves reason. Mind & Supra-intelligence with reason as an intermediate link are, spiritually, the Dream- State and operate absolutely and directly in the subtle body but indirectly, under limitations and as a governing and directing force in the gross body.

So far spirit and soul only have been evolved; the evolution of the Will has not manifested itself in physical forms. But in Mind Will has evolved a grand primal sense by which it is able to put itself into conscious relations with external objects; before the development of mind it has been operating by methods of self-contained consciousness through the supra-intelligence. Mind is in a way the one true and real sense; it is Mind that sees, Mind that hears, Mind that smells, Mind that feels, Mind that acts; but for the purposes of varied experience Mind evolves from itself ten potencies, five potencies of knowledge, sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste by which the Will receives impressions of external objects and five potencies of action, grasp, locomotion, utterance, emission and ecstasy, by which it reacts on what it receives; and for each of these potencies it evolves an instrument of potency or sense-organ, making up the ten *indriyas* with the Mind, which is alone self-acting and introspective, as the eleventh. So far however the Mind acts with rapidity and directness under the comparatively light restrictions of subtle matter in the Dream State; it is a psychical sense, an instrument of the soul for knowing and dealing with

life in the psychical world of subtle matter. Only in the physical evolution of gross matter do the sense-organs receive their consummate development and become of supreme importance; for Will in the Waking State acts mainly through them and not directly through the Mind. Soul-evolution precedes physical evolution. This theory directly contradicts those conclusions of modern Science which make soul an evolution of physical life and activities, not an all-important and enduring evolution, but merely their temporary efflorescence and dependent on them for its existence. Arguing from the facts of physical evolution which alone it has studied and excluding all possibilities outside this limit, Science is justified in coming to this conclusion, and, as a logical corollary, it is justified in denying the immortality of the soul. For if psychical activities are merely a later and temporary operation of physical life and dependent on the physical for their own continuance, it follows that when physical life ceases with the arrest of bodily operations by the mysterious agency of death, human personality which is a psychical activity must also come to an end. When the body dies, the soul dies also; it can no more outlast the body than the flower can outlast the plant on which it grows or a house survive the destruction of its foundations. Body is the stem, soul the flower; body the foundation, soul a light and temporary superstructure. To all this Hindu thought gives a direct denial. It claims to have discovered means of investigating psychical life as thoroughly as Science can investigate physical nature and in the light of its investigations it declares that soul exists before body and outlasts it. It is physical life that is an evolution from psychical, and no more than a later and temporary operation of psychical activities. Body is the flower, soul the stem; soul is the foundation, body the fragile and transient superstructure.

For the purposes of physical evolution Will evolves a new aspect of itself which is called Prana or vital energy. Prana exists in the physical state also, but there it is simple, undifferentiated, gathered up in mind and not acting as a separate agent. Prana in gross matter is an all-pervading energy which subsists wherever there is physical existence and is the principle agent in maintaining existence and furthering its activities. It is present in what seems inert and inanimate no less than in what is manifestly endowed with life. It lives concealed in the metal and the sod, it begins to emerge in the plant, it reveals itself in the animal. Prana is the agent of Will in all physical evolution. It is the mainspring of every hunger-impulse and presides over every process of alimentation. It creates life, it fills it with vital needs, desires, longings; it spurs it to the satisfaction of its needs & desires; and it evolves the means and superintends and conducts the processes of that satisfaction. In the course of evolution it reveals itself with an ever-rounding fulness, vibrates with an ever swifter and more complex energy, differentiates and enriches its activity with a more splendid opulence until the crescendo reaches its highest note in man. In this, the noblest type of physical evolution, Prana manifests itself in five distinct vital powers, to which the names, Prana, Samana, Vyana, Apana and Udana have been

given by the ancient writers. Prana, the vital force *par excellence* has its seat in the upper part of the body and conducts all mental operations, the indrawing and the outdrawing of the breath and the induction of food. Samana, seated centrally in the body, balances, equalizes and harmonizes the vital operations and is the agent for the assimilation of food. Vyana pervades the whole body; on it depends the circulation of the blood and the distribution of the essential part of the food eaten and digested throughout the body. Apana, situated in the lower part of the trunk, presides over the lower functions, especially over the emission of such parts of the food as are rejected by the body and over procreation, it is intimately connected with the processes of decay and death. Udana is the vital power which connects bodily life with the spiritual element in man. As in the purely vital operations, so also in the motional and volitional Prana is still the great agent of Will, and conducts such operations of Mind also as depend on the sense-organs for their instruments. Prana is the regent of the body, ministering to the Mind and through that great intermediary executing the behests of the concealed sovereign of existence, the Will.

As Prana is the first term in the physical evolution of the Self, so Anna, Food or gross visible matter is the second term. "I am food that devours the eater of food" says the Taittiriya Upanishad, and no formula could express more pregnantly and tersely the fundamental law of all phenomenal activity especially on the physical plane. The fundamental principle of vitality is hunger and all gross matter forms the food with which Prana satisfies this, its root-impulse. Hence the universality of the struggle for life. This hungry Prana first needs to build up a body in which it can subsist and in order to do so, it devours external substances so as to provide itself with the requisite material. This body once found it is continually eating up by the ceaselessness of its vital activity and has to repair its own ravages by continually drawing in external substances to form fresh material for an ever-wasting and ever-renewing frame. Unable to preserve its body for ever under the exhausting stress of its own activity, it has to procreate fresh forms which will continue vital activity and for the purpose concentrates itself in a part of its material which it throws out of itself to lead a similar but independent life even after the parent form decays. To satisfy its hunger it is ever evolving fresh means and new potencies for mastery & seizure of its food. Dissatisfied with the poor sustenance a stationary existence can supply, it develops the power & evolves various means of locomotion. To perceive its food more & more thoroughly & rapidly it develops the five senses and evolves the organs of perception through which they can act. To deal successfully with the food perceived, it develops the five potencies of action and evolves the active organs which enable them to work. As a centre of all this sensational and actional activity it evolves the central mind-organ in the brain and as channels of communication between the central & the outer organs it develops a great nerve-system centred in seven plexuses, through which it moves with a ceaseless stir and activity, satisfying hunger, satisfying lust, satisfying desire. At the base of all is the impulse of Life to

survive, to prolong itself for the purposes of the Will-to-live of which it is the creature and the servant. Prana & Anna, Vitality and physical form are, spiritually, the Waking-State and operate entirely in gross matter, — the last term of that downward evolution which is the descent of Spirit from the original purity of absolute existence into the impurity and multiplicity of matter.

Chapter IV. Psychical Evolution — Upward to Self.

In this downward psychical evolution, as in the downward spiritual evolution, each succeeding and newly-evolved state of the original Self obscures and overlays that which preceded it, until the last state of the Self appears to be an inert brute and inanimate condition of gross physical matter devoid of life, mental consciousness or spiritual possibilities. From this state of inert and lifeless matter the upward evolution starts and, as in our spiritual evolution the course set down for us is to recover from a firm footing in the Waking State mastery over the obscured and latent Dream and Sleep States and so return into the presence of that pure and unimaginable Self from whom the process of our evolution began, so in our psychical evolution we have to recover out of the inertia of gross physical materiality Life, Mind, Supra-Intelligence, Will until we know our infinite and eternal Self who is one with the Supreme Self of the Universe.

With inanimate matter the world began, says evolutionary Science; but in inanimate matter there is no evidence of life or mind or spirit, no apparent possibility of the evolution of animate conscious existence. Into this inanimate world at some unknown period, by some unknown means, perhaps from some unknown source, a mysterious thing called Life entered or began to stir and all this mighty evolution we have discovered became in a moment possible. Grant one infinitesimal seed of life and everything else becomes possible, but life itself we cannot explain nor can we discover as yet how it came originally into being. We can only suppose that life is some chemical process or develops from some chemical process we shall ultimately discover. Even what life is, has not been satisfactorily settled. The term is sometimes rigidly confined to animal life, — surely a crude and unscientific limitation, since the peculiarities of animal life, — consciousness and organic growth — , exist quite as evidently in the highest forms of plant-life as in the animalcule or the jelly-fish. Or if we confine life to organic growth, we do so arbitrarily, for recent discoveries have shown the beginning of one element of vital activity, the one which forms the very basis of consciousness, viz. reception of & reaction to outward impressions and the phenomena of vigour and exhaustion, in a substance so apparently inanimate as metal. So obscure is the whole subject that many are inclined to regard life as a divine mystery, breathed by God into the world or introduced, as if it were a sort of psychical meteoric dust, from some other planet. Upanishadic philosophy accounts

for the appearance of Life in a more calm and rational manner. Life, it would say, is in a sense a divine mystery but no more and no less so than the existence of inanimate matter. God did not breathe it from outside into an inert and created body, neither did it drift hither from some mystic and superior planet. Nor did it come into sudden being by some fortuitous chemical process which marked off suddenly all existences into two rigidly distinct classes, animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic. All such ideas are, when carefully examined, irrational and inconsistent with the unity and harmonious development of the world under fixed and invariable laws. Life is evolved naturally and not mysteriously out of matter itself, because it is already latent and preexistent in matter. Prana is involved in anna, matter cannot exist without latent life, and the first step in evolution is the liberation of the latent life out of the heavy obscuration of matter in its grossest and densest forms. This evolution is effected by the three gunas, the triple principle of reception, retention and reaction to outward impacts; as fresh forms of matter are evolved in which the power of retaining impacts received in the shape of impressions becomes more and more declared, consciousness slowly and laboriously develops; as the power of reacting on external objects becomes more pronounced and varied, organic life-growth begins its marvellous career; and the two, helping and enriching each other, evolve complete, well-organized and richly-endowed Life.

Prana receives its perfect development in animal life and when man, the highest term of animal life, has been reached, there is no farther need for its development. The true evolution of Man therefore lies not in the farther development of vitality, but in the complete & triumphant liberation of mind out of the overlaying obscuration of the vital energies. Just as Prana is involved in Anna and has to be evolved out of it, so Mind is involved in Prana and has to be evolved out of it. The moment Life begins to liberate itself from the obscuration of gross matter, the first step has been taken towards the evolution of Mind. We see the gradual development of Mind in animal evolution; the highest animal forms below man seem to possess not only memory and individuality, but a considerable degree of understanding and even the rudiments of reason. In man the development is much more rapid and triumphant, but it is by no means, as yet, complete or perfect. Prana still to an immense extent obscures Mind, the gross body dominates the subtle. Mind is dominated by the instruments which Prana has created for it; the body, the nerve-system, the sense-organs, the brain hamper and hinder its operations even more than they help them; for the Mind is bound within the narrow circle of their activity and limited by their deficiencies. The continual stir of the vital energies in the brain and throughout the whole system, disturb the Mind, the continual siege of external impressions distract it, the insistent urgency of the senses towards the external world impede the turning of the energies inward; calm and purity, concentration and introspection are rendered so difficult that the majority of men do not attempt them or only compass them spasmodically and imperfectly. Any powerful and unusual development of mind,

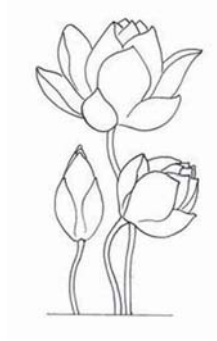
in its intellectual and spiritual tendencies, is apt to be resented by the vital part of man and to impair or seriously disturb his vital energies and physical health. Along with the intellectual development of the race, there has been a marked deterioration of vital vigour & soundness and of the bodily organs. Moral and spiritual development is continually at war with the needs of our physical life, our hungers, desires, lusts, longings and the insistent urgency of the instincts of self-preservation and self-gratification. It is therefore towards the conquest and control of Prana and the free development of Mind that the energies of Man ought in future to be directed. He must arrive at some arrangement of his social and individual life which, while satisfying the legitimate demands of his body and his vital impulses, will admit of the extreme and unhampered perfection of his intellectual, moral and spiritual being. He must discover and practise some method of maintaining the harmony and soundness of the vital and bodily instruments and processes without for a moment allowing the care for them to restrict the widest possible range, the most bold and powerful exercise and the most intense and fiery energisms of which the higher principle in his being is capable. He must learn how to transcend the limitations and errors of the physical senses and train his mind to act even in the physical body with the rapidity, directness and unlimited range proper to a psychical organ whose function is to operate in subtle as well as in gross matter. To see where the physical eye is blind, to hear where the physical ear is deaf, to feel where the physical sense is callous, to understand thoughts unexpressed, are legitimate functions of the mind; but they must be exercised, not as a rare power or in moments of supreme excitation, but as a regular and consciously willed operation, the processes of which have been mastered and known. Reason, at present fallible, imperfect and enslaved to desire and prejudice, must be trained into its highest possibilities of clarity, sanity and calm energy. The Mind must be tranquillised and purified by control of the senses and the five Pranas, and trained to turn itself wholly inward, excluding at will all outward impressions, so that Man may become master of the inner world no less than of the outer, a conscious soul using the body and no longer a body governed by a self-concealing and self-guiding psychical entity. We think we have done wonders in the way of mental evolution; in reality we have made no more than a feeble beginning. The infinite possibilities of that evolution still lie unexplored in front.

As Mind is involved in Prana, so is Supra-Intelligence involved and latent in all the operations of Mind. With the evolution of the Mind, some rudimentary beginnings have been unconsciously made towards the liberation of this higher & far grander force. As the mental development foreshadowed above proceeds to its goal, man will begin to evolve and realize himself as a mighty and infinite Intelligence, not limited by sense-perception or the laborious and clumsy processes of the reason, but capable of intuitive and infinite perception. And when the evolution of Mind is complete and the evolution of Supra-Intelligence proceeds, the liberation of the

Will involved in its operations will lead man to the highest evolution of all when he realizes himself as a potent and scient Will, master of creation and not its slave, whose infinite delight in its own existence is lifted far beyond the thralldom of pain and pleasure and uses them with as unalloyed a pleasure as the poet when he weaves joy and sorrow, delight and pain and love and fear and horror into one perfect and pleasurable masterpiece or the painter when he mixes his colours and blends light and shade to create a wedded harmony of form and hue. This state of unfettered Will and infinite Delight once realized, he cannot fail to know his real Self, absolute and calm, omnipotent and pure, the eternal Brahman in whom this evolution has its root and resting-place.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Isha Upanishad, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 232-44)



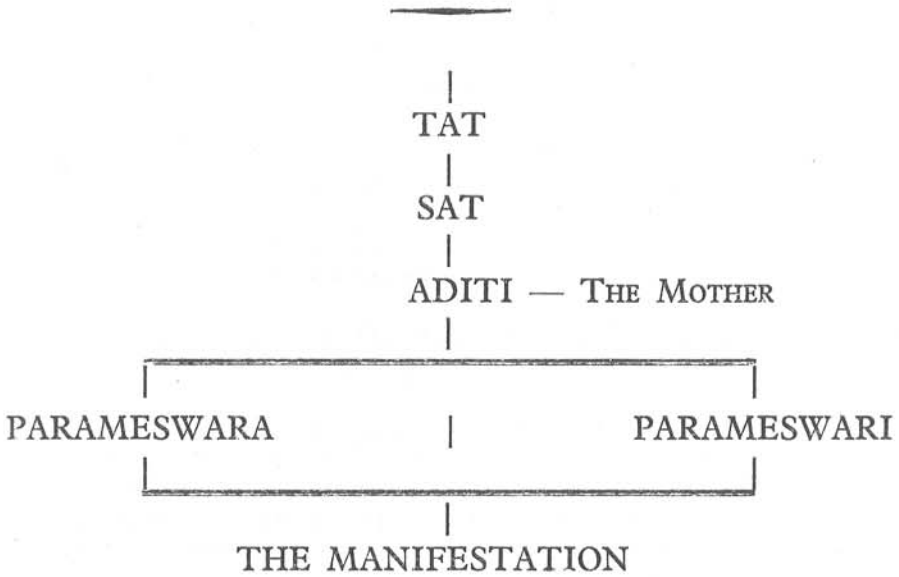
THE DIVINE PLAN

(A)

THE SUPREME SELF-CONTAINED ABSOLUTE

- FIRST ABSOLUTE — *TAT* The Absolute Transcendent, the Supreme, *parātpara* (containing all, limited by nothing).
- SECOND ABSOLUTE — *SAT* The supreme self-contained absolute Existence, Sachchidananda, (Ananda uniting Sat and Chit), holding in its absolute unity the dual Principle (He and She, *saḥ* and *sā*) and the four-fold Principle, OM with its four status as one.
- THIRD ABSOLUTE — *ADITI* Aditi is the indivisible conscious-force and Ananda of the Supreme; the Mother, its living dynamis, the supreme Love, Wisdom, Power. *Ādyā śakti=parabrahman* of the Tantra.

FOURTH ABSOLUTE— *PARAMESWARA* =Parameswari of
 of the Gita the Tantra



(B)

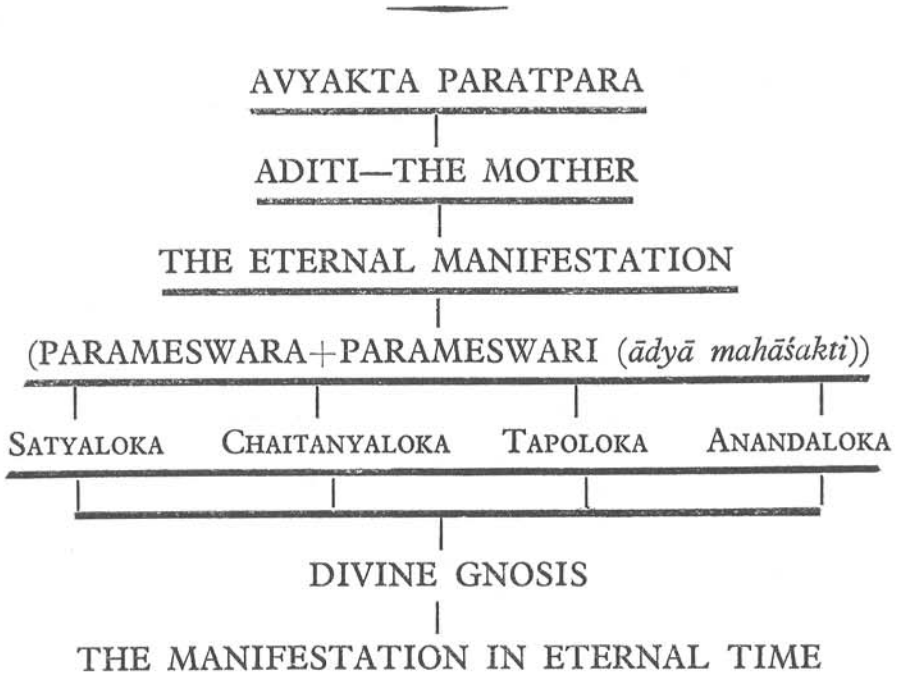
THE MANIFESTATION

I

FIRST ABSOLUTE The concealed—*avyakta*—Supreme, self-involved Sachchidananda, Parabrahman (Parameswara-iswari).

SECOND ABSOLUTE Aditi. The Mother, containing in herself the Supreme. The Divine Consciousness, Force, Ananda upholding all the universes. Para Shakti, Para Prakriti, Mahamaya (*yayedam dhāryate jagat*).

THIRD ABSOLUTE The Eternal Manifestation (The supreme Satyaloka, Chaitanyaloka, Tapoloka, Anandaloka—not those of the mental series).



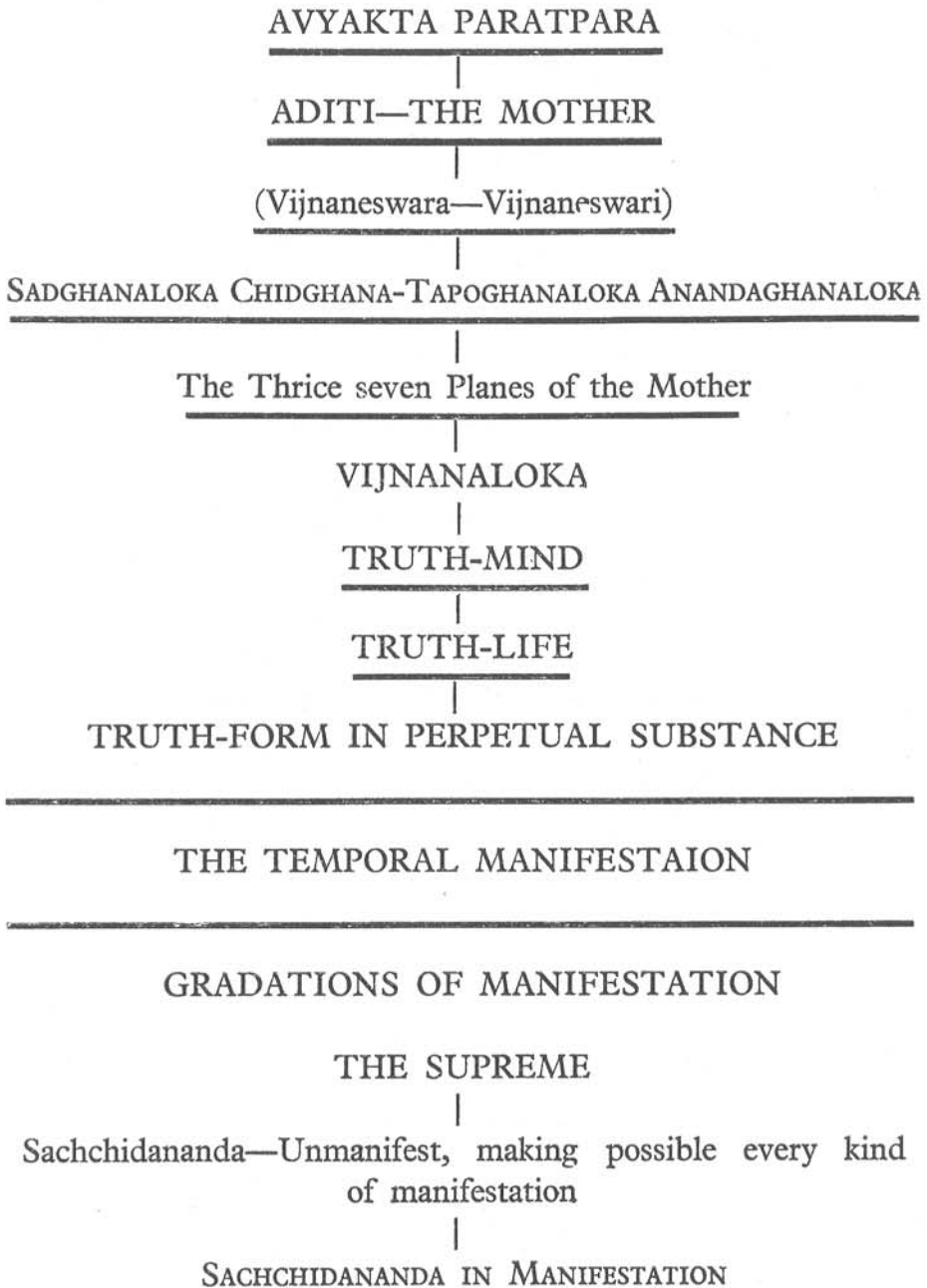
II

THE MANIFESTATION IN ETERNAL TIME

DIVINE GNOSIS

Satyam-Ritam-Brihat

—



The Supreme Planes of Infinite Consciousness

- (1) Sat (implying Chit-Tapas and Ananda)
- (2) Chit (implying Sat and Ananda)
- (3) Ananda (implying Sat and Chit-Tapas.)

|

SUPERMIND OR DIVINE GNOSIS

(The Self-Determining Infinite Consciousness)

From the point of view of our ascent upwards this is the Truth-Consciousness as distinguished from all below that belongs to the separative Ignorance.

|

OVERMIND OR MAYA

(Overmind takes all Truth that comes down to it from the Supermind, but sets up each Truth as a separate force and idea capable of conflicting with the others as well as cooperating with them. Each overmental being has his own world, each force has its own play and throws itself out to realise its own fulfilment in the cosmic play. All is possible ; and from this separative seat of conflicting and even mutually negating possibilities comes too, as soon as mind, life and matter are thrown out into play the possibility of ignorance, unconsciousness, falsehood, death and suffering.)

OVERMIND GRADATION TO MIND

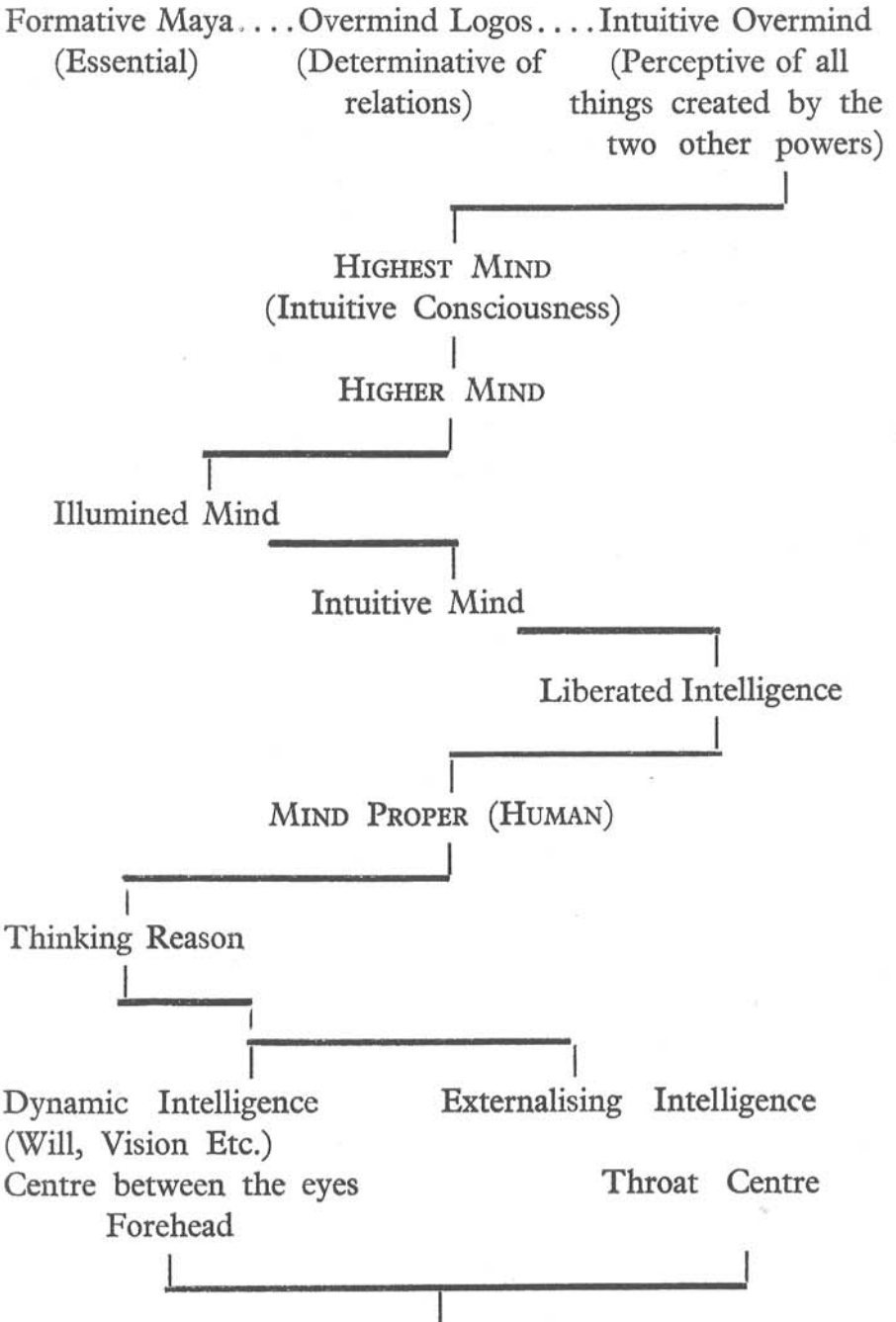
OVERMIND GNOSIS

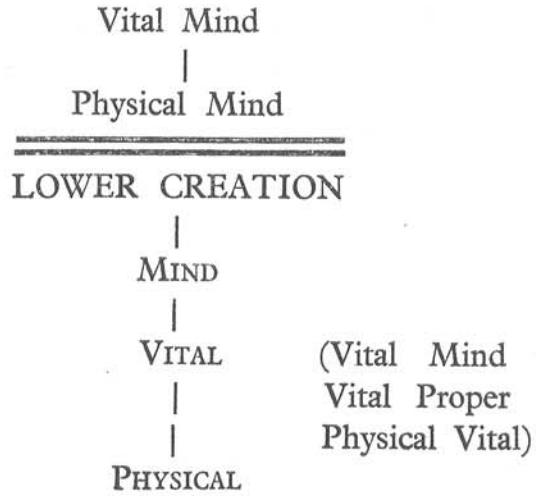
(Supermind subdued to the overmind play, limited and serving for true but limited creations)

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OVERMIND PROPER

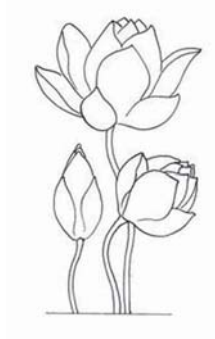






SRI AUROBINDO

(The Hour of God, first published 1959, pp. 86-92)



‘ . . . TO OBEY THY LAW WITH LOVE AND JOY ’

March 4, 1914

It is likely to be the last time for a long while that I am writing at this table, in this calm room all charged with Thy Presence. For the next three days I shall probably not be able to write. . . . In an indrawn state I contemplate this turning page, vanishing into the dream of the past and look at the new page all full potentially of the dream of the future. . . . And yet how trifling this seems, how childish and unimportant, when seen in the light of Thy eternity. The only thing that is important is to obey Thy law with love and joy.

O Lord, grant that everything in us may adore and serve Thee.
May Peace be with all!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 88)

INVOLUTION, EVOLUTION, DESCENT

Here is something important. Sri Aurobindo says that everything is involved down here — the mind, the vital, the supermind — and that what is involved evolves. But if everything is involved, including the supermind, what is the need for a ‘descent’? Can’t things evolve by themselves?

AH! He has explained this somewhere.

But I don’t remember seeing anything that satisfied me.

Isn’t it in the *Essays on the Gita*? He explains what Krishna says and how the two [descent and evolution] are combined. I read it not long ago because I was interested in this very question. And I even said something myself about the difference between what evolves (what emerges from this involution) and the Response from what already exists above in all its glory.

We’ll have to find this passage.

There are two lines in the ancient traditions, two ways of explaining this. One says it is by the ‘descent’ of what already exists in all its perfection that what is involved can be awakened to consciousness and evolution. It’s like the old story: when what Sri Aurobindo calls the universal Mother or the Shakti (or *Sachchidananda*) realised what had happened in Matter (that is, in what had created Matter) and that this involution had led to a state of Inconscience, total unconsciousness, the ancient lore says that at once the divine Love descended straight from the Lord into Matter and began to awaken what was involved there.

Other traditions speak of the Consciousness, the divine Consciousness, instead of Love. One even finds accounts full of imagery depicting a Being of prismatic light lying in deep sleep in the cave of the Inconscient; and this Descent awakens him to an activity which is still (how to put it?) inner, an immobile activity, an activity by radiation. Countless rays issue from his body and spread throughout the Inconscient, and little by little they awaken in each thing, in each atom, as it were, the aspiration to Consciousness and the beginning of evolution.

I have had this experience.

I have had the experience of being ‘missioned’, so to speak, in a form of Love and Consciousness combined — divine Love in its supreme purity, divine Consciousness in its supreme purity — and emanated DIRECTLY, without passing through all the intermediate states, directly into the nethermost depths of the Inconscient. And there I had the impression of being, or rather of finding a symbolic Being in deep sleep . . . so veiled that he was almost invisible. Then, at my contact, the veil

seemed to be rent and, without his awakening, there was a sort of radiation spreading out. . . . I can still see my vision.

(*silence*)

There is always what could almost be called a popular way of presenting things. Take the whole Story of the Creation, of how things have come about: it can be told as an unfolding story (this is what Théon did in a book he called *The Tradition* — he told the whole story in the Biblical manner, with psychological knowledge hidden in symbols and forms). There is a psychological manner of telling things and a metaphysical manner. The metaphysical, for me, is almost incomprehensible; it's uninteresting (or interesting only to minds that are made that way). An almost childish, illustrative way of telling things seems more evocative to me than any metaphysical theory (but this is a personal opinion — and of no great moment!). The psychological approach is more dynamic for transformation, and Sri Aurobindo usually adopted it. He doesn't tell us stories (I was the one who told him stories! Images are very evocative for me). But if one combines the two approaches. . . . Actually, to be philosophical, one would have to combine the three. But I have always found the metaphysical approach ineffective; it doesn't lead to realisation but only gives people the *idea* that they know, when they really know nothing at all. From the standpoint of *push*, of a dynamic urge towards transformation, the psychological approach is obviously the most powerful. But the other is lovelier!

In *The Hour of God*, there's a whole diagram of the Manifestation made by Sri Aurobindo: first comes this, then comes that, then comes the other, and so forth — a whole sequence. They published this in the book in all seriousness, but I must say that Sri Aurobindo did it for fun (I saw him do it). Someone had spoken to him about different religions, different philosophical methods — Theosophy, Madame Blavatsky, all those people (there was Théon, too). Well, each one had made his diagram. So Sri Aurobindo said, "I can make a diagram, too, and mine will be much more complete!" When he finished it, he laughed and said, "But it's only a diagram, it's just for fun." They published it very solemnly, as if he had made a very serious proclamation. Oh, it's a very complicated diagram!

But the trouble is that people will say: what's the need for a 'descent' if all is involved and then evolves? Why a descent? Why should there be an intervention from a higher plane?

I beg your pardon, but what was built up through this involution had to be unbuilt. The *cause* of this involution had to be undone.

The way Théon told it, there was first the universal Mother (he didn't call her the universal Mother, but Sri Aurobindo used that name), the universal Mother in charge

of creation. For creating she made four emanations: Consciousness or Light; Life; Love or Beatitude and (*Mother tries to remember the fourth*) . . . I must have cerebral anemia today! In India they speak only of three: Sat-Chit-Ananda (Sat is Existence, expressed by Life; Chit is Consciousness, expressed by Power; Ananda is Bliss, synonymous with Love). But according to Théon, there were four (I knew them by heart). Well, these emanations (Théon narrated it in such a way that someone not a philosopher, someone with a childlike mind, could understand), these emanations, conscious of their own power, separated themselves from their Origin; that is, instead of being entirely surrendered to the supreme Will and expressing only. . . . Ah, the fourth emanation is Truth! Instead of carrying out only the supreme Will, they seem to have acquired a sense of personal power. (They were personalities of sorts, universal personalities, each representing a mode of being.) Instead of remaining connected, they cut the link — each acted on his own, to put it simply. Then, naturally, Light became darkness, Life became death, Bliss became suffering and Truth became falsehood. And these are the four great Asuras: the Asura of Inconscience, the Asura of Falsehood, the Asura of Suffering and the Asura of Death.

Once this had occurred, the divine Consciousness turned towards the Supreme and said (*Mother laughs*): “Well, here’s what has happened. What’s to be done?” Then from the Divine came an emanation of Love (in the first emanation it wasn’t Love, it was Ananda, Bliss, the Delight of being which became Suffering), and from the Supreme came Love; and Love descended into this domain of Inconscience, the result of the creation of the first emanation, Consciousness — Consciousness and Light had become Inconscience and Darkness. Love descended straight from the Supreme into this Inconscience; the Supreme, that is, created a new emanation, which didn’t pass through the intermediate worlds (because, according to the story, the universal Mother first created all the gods who, when they descended, remained in contact with the Supreme and created all the intermediate worlds to counterbalance this fall — it’s the old story of the ‘Fall’, this fall into the Inconscient. But that wasn’t enough). Simultaneously with the creation of the gods, then, came this direct Descent of Love into Matter, without passing through all the intermediate worlds. That’s the story of the first Descent. But you’re speaking of the descent heralded by Sri Aurobindo, the Supramental Descent, aren’t you?

Not only that. For example, Sri Aurobindo says that when Life appeared there was a pressure from below, from evolution, to make Life emerge from Matter, and simultaneously a descent of Life from its own plane. Then, when Mind emerged out of Life, the same thing from above happened again. Why this intervention from above each time? Why don’t things emerge normally, one after another, without needing a ‘descent’?

You may as well ask why everything has gone wrong! No, with experience it becomes easy to understand.

Take the experience of Mind, for example: Mind, in the evolution of Nature, gradually emerging from its involution; well — and this is a very concrete experience — these initial ‘mentalised forms’, if we can call them that, were necessarily incomplete and imperfect, because Nature’s evolution is slow and hesitant and complicated. Thus these forms inevitably had an aspiration towards a sort of perfection and a truly perfect mental state, and this aspiration brought the descent of already fully conscious beings from the mental world who united with terrestrial forms — this is a very, very concrete experience. What emerges from the Inconscient in this way is an almost impersonal possibility (yes, an impersonal possibility, and perhaps not altogether universal, since it’s connected with the history of the earth); but anyway it’s a general possibility, not personal. And the Response from above is what makes it concrete, so to speak, bringing in a sort of perfection of the state and an individual mastery of the new creation. These beings in corresponding worlds (like the gods of the Overmind, or the beings of higher regions) came upon earth as soon as the corresponding element began to evolve out of its involution. This accelerates the action, first of all, but also makes it more perfect — more perfect, more powerful, more conscious. It gives a sort of sanction to the realisation. Sri Aurobindo writes of this in *Savitri* — Savitri lives always on earth, with the soul of the earth, to make the whole earth progress as quickly as possible. Well, when the time comes and things on earth are ready, then the divine Mother incarnates with her full power — when things are ready. Then will come the perfection of the realisation. A splendour of creation exceeding all logic! It brings in a fullness and a power completely beyond the petty shallow logic of human mentality.

People can’t understand! To put oneself at the level of the general public may be all very well (personally I have never found it so, although it’s probably inevitable), but to hope that they will ever understand the splendour of the Thing. . . . They have to live it first!

I myself would *never* try to deal with the ‘why’; I would always say, “This is how it is.” When people ask me, “Why did it happen like this? Why is the world so unhappy? Why does it have to be dark before growing luminous? Why has there been this ‘accident’ (if it can be called an ‘accident’)? Why did the Lord permit?” You can say it’s because of this, because of that — there are fifty thousand replies and they’re all worthless.

It’s like this because that’s the way it is!

It wasn’t so much a question of the ‘why’ as of the process.

The process? I am giving you an historical process that I know through experience.

Both are needed.

Yes. The earth is a representative and symbolic world, a kind of crystallisation and concentration of the evolutionary labour giving it a . . . more concrete reality. It has to be taken like this: the history of the earth is a symbolic history. And it is on earth that this Descent takes place (it's not the history of the universal but of the terrestrial creation); the Descent occurs in the individual *terrestrial* being, in the individual terrestrial atmosphere.

Let's take *Savitri*, which is very explicit on this: the universal Mother is universally present and at work in the universe, but the earth is where concrete form is given to all the work to be done to bring evolution to its perfection, its goal. Well, at first there's a sort of emanation representative of the universal Mother, which is always on earth to help it prepare itself; then, when the preparation is complete, the universal Mother herself will descend upon earth to finish her work. And this She does with Satyavan — Satyavan is the soul of the earth. She lives in close union with the soul of the earth and together they do the work; She has chosen the soul of the earth for her work, saying, "Here is where I will do my work." Elsewhere (*Mother indicates regions of higher Consciousness*), it's enough just to *be* and things simply *are*. Here on earth you have to work.

There are clearly universal repercussions and effects, of course, but the thing is *worked out* here, the place of work is *here*. So instead of living beatifically in Her universal state and beyond, in the extra-universal eternity outside of time, She says, "No, I am going to do my work *here*, I choose to work *here*." The Supreme then tells her, "What you have expressed is My Will." . . . "I want to work *here*, and when all is ready, when the earth is ready, when humanity is ready (even if no one is aware of it), when the Great Moment comes, well . . . I will descend to finish my work."

That's the story.

So if people ask "why?" we can tell them, "I don't know, but that's how it is." Why? (*Mother shrugs her shoulders*) How can a small human brain understand why! When you live it, you know! There's no problem, it's clear; it's like that because it's like that. It had to be that way — that's how it is.

You can find all sorts of explanations for it: consciousness would never have been so complete, joy would never have been so full, the realisation would never have been so total, if one had not passed through . . . all that. But these explanations are just to satisfy the mind. When you live in it, there's no need for explanations.

July 28, 1961

THE MOTHER

(From a conversation with a disciple)

A VISION

On 28 May 1958, the Mother recounted a vision she once had of a wonderful Being of Love and Consciousness, emanated from the Supreme Origin and projected directly into the Inconscient so that the creation would gradually awaken to the Supramental Consciousness. The Mother's account of this vision was brought out in November 1906 in the Revue Cosmique, a monthly review published in Paris. Six other visions followed in 1906 and 1907. Although these accounts are unsigned, the fact that they begin with the same words, are written in the same style and develop on the same lines of experience, makes it almost certain that they are by the Mother.

In recounting her visions the Mother used a few terms taken from the "cosmic philosophy" expounded in the Revue. They have been rendered only approximately in translation so as to preserve the literary quality of the text. These terms are identified in the text by footnotes.

In this issue we are publishing the first of the seven visions.

I SLEPT and now I am awake.

I slept upon the western waters, and now I enter the ocean in order to explore its depths. Its surface is green as beryl, tinted silver by the moonlight. Beneath, the water is sapphire-blue and soon becomes faintly luminous.

I lay down upon undulations that shimmered like the ripples in moire, and now I descend, rocked from one undulation to the next by a gentle regular motion, borne straight towards the west. As I glide downwards, the water grows more luminous and is streaked with wide silvery currents.

Thus I go on descending for a long time, rocked from undulation to undulation, down and ever further down.

Suddenly, looking upward, I notice a gleam of pink; I draw nearer and see a coral-like shrub, as large as a tree, clinging to a blue rock. Water creatures come and go in countless variety. Now I stand on the fine bright sand. I look around me in wonder. There are mountains and valleys, fantastic forests, strange flowers which could almost be animals, fish one could take for flowers — there is no separation, no interval between stationary and moving beings. Everywhere are colours, soft or vivid and iridescent, yet always refined and in harmony with one another. I walk on golden sand and gaze at all this beauty, which is bathed in a faint pale-blue radiance dotted with tiny circling spheres, red or green or golden.

How marvellous are the depths of the sea! Everywhere one feels the presence of the One in whom all harmonies dwell!

I continue westwards, with no fatigue or lessening of speed. Scene follows scene in incredible variety; there, on a rock of lapis-lazuli, are fine and delicate seaweeds, like long blond or violet hair; here are great rose-coloured walls, all spangled with silver; there are flowers which seem carved from enormous diamonds; and here are goblets as fine as if they had been wrought by the most skilful of craftsmen, containing what look like drops of emerald throbbing with alternate pulsations of shadow and light.

Now I have entered on a path of silver sand between two walls of rock as blue as sapphire; the water becomes more clear and luminous.

Suddenly, at a turn in the path, I find myself before a cave which appears to be made of wrought crystal, all sparkling with rainbow light.

Between two iridescent columns stands a tall being; his face is that of a very young man, and is framed with short fair curls; his eyes are as green as the sea. He wears a light-blue tunic, and on his shoulders are great snow-white fins in place of wings. On seeing me, he stands back against a column to let me pass. Hardly have I crossed the threshold when an exquisite melody strikes my ears. Here the water is all iridescent, the ground is strewn with nacreous pearls; the entrance and the vault, from which graceful stalactites are hanging, are like opal, and delectable perfumes fill the air. Galleries, nooks and recesses open on every side, but straight in front of me I see a great light, and towards that I direct my steps. This light is made of wide rays of gold, silver, sapphire and emerald and ruby, all issuing from a point too distant for me to distinguish what it is, and streaming out in all directions. I feel myself being drawn towards their centre by a powerful attraction.

Now I can see the source of these rays and I behold an oval of white light, haloed by a splendid rainbow. The oval is lying horizontally, and I sense¹ that the one whom the light hides from my view is deep in sleep. I stand long at the outer edge of the rainbow, peering through the light to see the one who lies sleeping in such splendour. Unable to distinguish anything in this way, I enter first the rainbow, and then the shining white oval. Now I see a marvellous being, lying on what seems to be a mass of white down; his lithe, incomparably beautiful body is clothed in a long white robe. Of his head, which rests on his folded arm, I can see only his long locks, the colour of ripe grain, flowing down over his shoulders. A powerful and sweet emotion floods through me at this magnificent sight, and also a profound reverence.

Has the sleeper sensed² my presence? Now he awakes, and rises in all his grace and beauty. He turns towards me and his eyes meet mine, eyes that are mauve and shining, full of infinite sweetness and tenderness. Without a word, he bids me a loving³ welcome, to which my whole being joyously responds; then, taking me by

1. *Sentienter*: to be aware with all the senses (physical and subtle) together.

2. *ditto*.

3. *Pathitique*: full of divinised love.

the hand, he leads me to the couch he has just left. I lie down upon this downy whiteness and the harmonious visage leans over me. A sweet flow of force suffuses me entirely, vitalising, revivifying each cell.

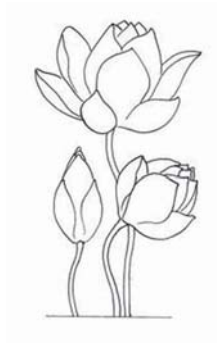
Then, surrounded by the splendid rainbow hues, wrapped in soothing melodies and exquisite perfumes, beneath that powerful and tender gaze, I fell asleep in a beatific repose. And in my sleep I learned many beautiful and useful things.

Of all the marvellous things that I understood without the sound of words, I shall mention only one.

Wherever there is beauty, wherever there is radiance, wherever there is progress towards perfection, be it in the Heavens of the heights or in the Heavens of the depths, there, surely, beings will be found in the form and likeness of man — man, the supreme agent of terrestrial evolution.

THE MOTHER

(Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, August 1981)



BIRTH OF THE GODS AND THE GODDESSES

Sweet Mother, how were the gods and goddesses born?

BUT it is precisely. . . it is part of the creation. What we call “Aditi” here, that is, the Creative Consciousness, well, the Creative Consciousness . . .

I am going to tell you about this in an absolutely childish way:

She formed at first four beings; when she received the mission to create she put out four emanations from her being; and these four emanations were made and given the charge to develop the universe. And then — I think I have already spoken to you about this once — it turned out badly, we could put it like that; and so when things went wrong, she made another creation of all the beings who became the gods; and parallel to the disorder created by the first four emanations, there was the development in order, that is, under the guidance of the Supreme, the creation in order of all the worlds descending further and further towards Matter. And it is to this line that the gods belong who were manifested later, a formation, a greater and greater materialisation in the domain which Sri Aurobindo has termed the Overmind. And from there they presided over the creation of the material universe and the earth. And one of the proceedings was the formation of the earth as a symbolic creation representative of the whole universe, in order to condense and concentrate the problem so that it might be solved more easily. And this earth, though it may be from the astronomical point of view something infinitesimal and as unimportant as can be, from the occult point of view of the universal creation it is a symbol which represents the universe so perfectly that by transforming the earth one can through contagion or analogy transform the universe, because the earth is the symbol of the universe. This was the procedure adopted by the gods. And the place that’s the seat of existence of these gods Sri Aurobindo has called the Overmind.

Of course things are not like that. Don’t think that I have just told you the story as it really happened. Things are not like that, but it’s a way of speaking, a way of making them understandable to the brain. It appears to have occurred like that.

18 May 1955

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1955, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 7, pp. 157-58)

THE STORY OF CREATION

From where do the gods come?

THAT means? . . . “From where” means what? What is their origin? Who has formed them? . . . But everything, everything comes from the one Origin, from the Supreme, the gods also.

There is a very old tradition which narrates this. I am going to tell you the story as one does to children, for in this way you will understand:

One day “God” decided to exteriorise himself, objectivise himself, in order to have the joy of knowing himself in detail. So, first of all, he emanated his consciousness (that is to say, he manifested his consciousness) by ordering this consciousness to realise a universe. This consciousness began by emanating four beings, four individualities which were indeed altogether very high beings, of the highest Reality. They were the being of consciousness, the being of love (of Ananda rather), the being of life and the being of light and knowledge — but consciousness and light are the same thing. There we are then: consciousness, love and Ananda, life and truth — truth, that’s the exact word. And naturally, they were supremely powerful beings, you understand. They were what are called in that tradition the first emanations, that is, the first formations. And each one became very conscious of its qualities, its power, its capacities, its possibilities, and, suddenly forgot each in its own way that it was only an emanation and an incarnation of the Supreme. And so this is what happened: when light or Consciousness separated from the divine Consciousness, that is, when it began to think it was the divine Consciousness and that there was nothing other than itself, it suddenly became obscurity and inconscience. And when Life thought that all life was in itself and that there was nothing else but its life and that it did not depend at all upon the Supreme, then its life became death. And when Truth thought that it contained all truth, and that there was no other truth than itself, this Truth became falsehood. And when love or Ananda was convinced that it was the supreme Ananda and that there was no other than itself and its felicity, it became suffering. And that is how the world, which was to have been so beautiful, became so ugly. Now, that consciousness (if you like to call it the Divine Mother, the Supreme Consciousness), when she saw this she was very disturbed, you may be sure, she said to herself: “This has really not succeeded.” So she turned back to the Divine, to God, the Supreme, and she asked him to come to her aid. She said to him: “This is what has happened. Now what is to be done?” He said: “Begin again, but try to manage in such a way that the beings do not become so independent! . . . They must remain in contact with you, and through you with me.” And it was thus that she created the gods, who were quite docile and not so

proud, and who began the creation of the world. But as the others had come before them, at every step the gods met the others. And it was in this way that the world changed into a battlefield, a place of war, strife, suffering, darkness and all the rest, and for each new creation the gods had to fight with the others who had gone ahead: they had preceded them, they had plunged headlong into matter; and they had created all this disorder and the gods had to put straight all this confusion. That is where the gods came from. They are the second emanations.

Mother, the first four who changed, was it by chance or was it deliberately?

No. What is chance?

It is said also — that is the continuation of the story or rather its beginning — that the Divine wanted his creation to be a free creation. He wanted all that went forth from him to be absolutely independent and free in order to be able to unite with him in freedom, not through compulsion. He did not want that they should be compelled to be faithful, compelled to be conscious, compelled to be obedient. They had to do it spontaneously, through the knowledge and conviction that that was much better. So this world was created as a world of total freedom, freedom of choice. And it is in this way that at every moment everyone has the freedom of choice — but with all the consequences. If one chooses well, it is good, but if one chooses ill, ah well, what's to happen happens — that is what has happened!

The story may be understood in a much more occult and spiritual sense. But it is like all the stories of the universe: if you want to narrate them so that people may understand, they become stories for children. But if one knows how to see the truth behind the symbols, one understands everything. Even with what I have told you, which seems like a little story for children, even like that, if you understand what I have told you and the meaning of what I have told you, you can have the secret of things.

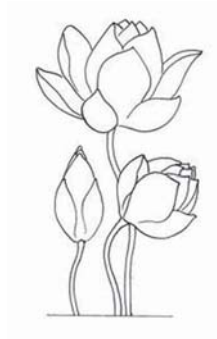
There are traditions which say that it is an “accident”, in the sense that it could have been otherwise. But it happened like that. It is true, it came about like that. Only, it was quite understandable that every one of these elements having its origin in the Supreme, being quite close to the Emanation at that moment, quite close to the Origin, carried in itself the consciousness of its divinity and superiority, necessarily, since this is not a creation made with something foreign to the Divine: it is simply the Divine who has emanated himself, as though he were looking at himself — he objectivises himself in order to become aware of all that he is; instead of being in an inner static state of concentration in which all is unmanifested, he projects that outside himself “in order to see”, as though he wanted to see all that is within him, that is, all the infinity of possibilities. So, all was possible. It happened like that — it could have happened otherwise. Besides, nothing tells you that alongside our universe such as it is, there do not exist others which are so different

that there cannot be any relation between one universe and another. It can very well be that our universe is not the only exteriorisation of the Divine. Ours is such as we know it; there may be others which are in much less sorry a state than this one! Besides, it is lamentable only in its appearance. If you go behind the appearance, you become aware that it is not lamentable at all. It is only one way of seeing.

25 November 1953

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1953, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 5, pp. 371-75)



DIVINE LOVE DESCENDED INTO MATTER

*You say, "Love is everywhere. Its movement is there in plants, perhaps in the very stones. . . ."*¹ *If there is love in a stone, how can one see it?*

PERHAPS the different elements constituting the stone are coordinated by the spark of love. I am sure that when the Divine Love descended into Matter, this Matter was quite unconscious, it had absolutely no form; it may even be said that forms in general are the result of the effort of Love to bring consciousness into Matter. If one of you (I have my doubts, but still) went down into the Inconscient, what is called the pure Inconscient, you would realise what it is. A stone will seem to you a marvellously conscious object in comparison. You speak disdainfully of a stone because you have just a wee bit more consciousness than it has, but the difference between the consciousness of the stone and the total Inconscient is perhaps greater than that between the stone and you. And the coming out of the Inconscient is due exclusively to the sacrifice of the Divine, to this descent of divine Love into the Inconscient. Consequently, when I said "perhaps in the stone", I could have removed the "perhaps" — I can assert that *even* in the stone it is there. There would be nothing, neither stone nor metal nor any organisation of atoms without this presence of Divine Love.

Most people say there is "consciousness" when they begin to think — when one doesn't think one is not conscious. But plants are perfectly conscious and yet they do not think. They have very precise sensations which are the expression of a consciousness, but they do not think. Animals begin to think and their reactions are much more complex. But both plants and animals are conscious. One can be conscious of a sensation without having the least thought.

Did material substance exist before the descent of Divine Love?

I don't think it could be said that there was a material substance. The Inconscient . . . is the Inconscient. I don't know how to explain this to you. If there is a negation of something, it is truly the Inconscient, it is the negation of everything. It has not even the capacity of emptiness. One needs to have descended there to know what it is and explain it. Words cannot describe it. It is the negation of all things because everything begins with consciousness. Without consciousness there is nothing.

Were there any beings before this descent of Love? Were they conscious?

1. *Questions and Answers 1929* (2 June).

There were no terrestrial beings. The terrestrial world, the earth came into existence after the descent into the Inconscient, not before.

The gradual formation of the different stages of being, from the Supreme to the most material region, is subsequent to the Inconscient. When, precisely, the Consciousness “began” its creation (don’t take what I say quite literally as though it were a little history of another country, for it is not that, I am trying to make you understand, that’s all), the first manifestation of the creative Consciousness was just an emanation of consciousness — of conscious light — and when this emanation separated itself from its origin, the Inconscient was born, through opposition (how to put it?) yes, really through opposition. Consequently, the birth of the Inconscient is prior to the formation of the world, and it was only when the perception came that the whole universe was going to be created uselessly that there was a call and Divine Love plunged into the Inconscient to change it into consciousness. Therefore, it can be said that the formation of the material worlds as we know them is the result of the descent of the supreme Consciousness into the Inconscient. It cannot be said that there was something prior to that, things as we know them in the material world (I apologise for the ambiguity of my words, but you understand one cannot express these things in our usual words).

The formation of the earth as we know it, this infinitesimal point in the immense universe, was made precisely in order to concentrate the effort of transformation upon one point; it is like a symbolic point created in the universe to make it possible, while working directly upon one point, to radiate it over the entire universe.

If we want to make the problem a little more comprehensible, it is enough to limit ourselves to the creation and the history of the earth, for it is a good symbol of universal history.

From the astronomical point of view the earth is nothing, it is a very small accident. From the spiritual point of view, it is a symbolic willed formation. And as I have already said, it is only upon earth that this Presence is found, this direct contact with the supreme Origin, this presence of the divine Consciousness hidden in all things.

The other worlds have been organised more or less hierarchically, if one may say so, but the earth has a special formation due to the direct intervention, without any intermediary, of the supreme Consciousness in the Inconscient.

24 March 1951

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1950-51, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 240-42)

THE FIRST FOUR EMANATIONS OF THE UNIVERSAL MOTHER

I'd like to ask you a question about those lines from Savitri¹ I showed you the other day. I don't know if you remember — the passage about the “white gods”.

WHAT did you want to ask? What was it that “the white gods had missed”? But Sri Aurobindo has written it all down in full, right here in the *Aphorisms*.² He has mentioned everything, taken up one thing after another: “Without this, there would not have been that; without this, there would not have been that . . .” and so on.²

But I also remember reading *The Tradition*, before I met Sri Aurobindo (it was like a novel, a serialised romance of the world's creation, but it was very evocative; Théon called it *The Tradition*). That was where I first learned of the universal Mother's first four emanations, when the Lord delegated his creative power to the Mother. And it was identical to the ancient Indian tradition, but told like a nursery story; anyone could understand — it was an image, like a movie, and very vivid.

So She made her first four emanations. The first was Consciousness and Light (arising from Sachchidananda); the second was Ananda and Love; the third was Life; and Truth was the fourth. Then, so the story goes, conscious of their infinite power, instead of keeping their connection with the supreme Mother and, through Her, with the Supreme, instead of receiving indications for action from Him and

1. Not only is there hope for godheads pure;
The violent and darkened deities
Leaped down from the one breast in rage to find
What the white gods had missed: they too are safe;
A mother's eyes are on them and her arms
Stretched out in love desire her rebel sons.

Savitri, p. 613

2. 88 - This world was built by Death that he might live. Wilt thou abolish death? Then life too will perish. Thou canst not abolish death, but thou mayst transform it into a greater living.

89 - This world was built by Cruelty that she might love. Wilt thou abolish cruelty? Then love too will perish. Thou canst not abolish cruelty, but thou mayst transfigure it into its opposite, into a fierce Love and Delightfulness.

90 - This world was built by Ignorance and Error that they might know. Wilt thou abolish ignorance and error? Then knowledge too will perish. Thou canst not abolish ignorance and error, but thou mayst transmute them into the utter and effulgent exceeding of reason.

91 - If Life alone were and not death, there could be no immortality; if love were alone and not cruelty, joy would be only a tepid and ephemeral rapture; if reason were alone and not ignorance, our highest attainment would not exceed a limited rationality and worldly wisdom.

92 - Death transformed becomes Life that is Immortality; Cruelty transfigured becomes Love that is intolerable ecstasy; Ignorance transmuted becomes Light that leaps beyond wisdom and knowledge.

doing things in proper order, they were conscious of their own power and each one took off independently to do as he pleased — they had power and they used it. They forgot their Origin. And because of this initial oblivion, Consciousness became unconsciousness, and Light became darkness; Ananda became suffering, Love became hate; Life became Death; and Truth became Falsehood. And they were instantly thrown headlong into what became Matter. According to Théon, the world as we know it is the result of that. And that was the Supreme himself in his first manifestation.

But the story is easy to understand, and quite evocative. On the surface, for intellectuals, it's very childish; but once you have the experience you understand it very well — I understood and felt the thing immediately.

And once the world has become like that, has become the vital world in all its darkness, and they, from this vital world, have created Matter, the supreme Mother sees (*laughing*) the result of Her first four emanations and She turns towards the Supreme in a great entreaty: “Now that this world is in such a dreadful state, it has to be saved! We can't just leave it this way, can we? It has to be saved, the divine consciousness must be given back to it. What to do?” And the Supreme says, “Thrust yourself into a new emanation, an emanation of the ESSENCE of Love, down into the most material Matter.” That meant plunging into the earth (the earth had become a symbol and a representation of the whole drama). “Plunge into Matter.” So She plunged into Matter, and that became the primordial source of the Divine within material substance. And from there (as is so well described in *Savitri*), She begins to act as a leaven in Matter, raising it up from within.

And as She plunged into the earth, a second series of emanations was sent forth — the gods — to inhabit the intermediary zones between Sachchidananda and the earth. And these gods (*laughing*) . . . well, great care was taken to make them perfect, so they wouldn't give any trouble! But they are a bit . . . a bit too perfect, aren't they? Yes, a bit too perfect: they never make mistakes, they always do exactly as they're told. . . . In short, rather lacking in initiative. They do have some, but. . . .

In fact, they were not *surrendered* in the way a psychic being can be, because they had no psychic in them. The psychic being is the result of that descent. Only human beings have it. And that's what makes humanity so superior to the gods. Théon insisted greatly on this: throughout his story, humans are far superior to gods and should not obey them — they should only be in contact with the Supreme in his aspect of perfect Love.

27 January 1962

THE MOTHER

(From a conversation with a disciple)

THE SILENCE OF THE SAMADHI

A Letter

YOUR question — “Why are you so silent about the Samadhi?” — has set me off on a shining trail. What did you want me to say? My appeals to the Mother on behalf of my friends go on as usual. But your use of the word “silent” is quite suggestive. One can’t help being silent in connection with the Samadhi — not only because the qualities of this holy place exceed one’s power of speech but also because the Samadhi essentially represents the power of silence. Mind my expression: with silence I have associated power. Such an association is most apt in relation to Sri Aurobindo. As he had withdrawn into the solitude of his room after the end of 1926 to concentrate on his spiritual work, and put the Mother in the forefront to deal with his disciples from day to day, we were physically in his presence on only four special occasions in the year and naturally there was silence during them. But, unlike a Yogi like Ramana Maharshi sitting quietly for hours and diffusing intense peace, Sri Aurobindo keeping silent filled us with what I may indicate by inverting a mantric line from his “The Life Heavens” thus:

Rest one with unimaginable Force.¹

It was as if we were stilled into a deep surrender to a Divine Presence that irresistibly carried us forward on the path of Perfection. This Presence is well hit off by the paradox in that stanza from Sri Aurobindo’s “Jivanmukta”, a poem on the Vedantic ideal of the living liberated man about which he noted: “Perhaps I have given a pull towards my own ideal which the strict Vedantin would consider illegitimate.” The stanza runs:

A Power descends no Fate can perturb or vanquish,
Calmer than mountains, wider than marching waters,
A single might of luminous quiet
Tirelessly bearing the worlds and ages.²

What I mean by the extraordinary element in Sri Aurobindo may be most pointedly driven home by my feeling when I first looked at his body after he had left it on December 5, 1950. I marked that there was nothing like what people

1. The original line runs ‘Force one with unimaginable rest’. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 550-51.

2. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 551-52.

usually speak of when they stand before someone dead. They refer to the expression of peace on the face. I saw the very opposite. Certainly not any stamp of agitation but the unmoving source of a sovereign dynamism. A tremendous power seemed to emanate from the face and figure. Wave after wave of it filled the room and surrounded me. I perceived an overwhelming air of Conquest. A king was taking his siesta after a supreme victory. From the flaring nostrils to the way in which the legs were stretched out, slightly apart, there was a natural aspect of domination. Spontaneously, effortlessly an assertion of empire could be experienced. Here was a silence, transcendent of all creation — an ultimate absolute of the ineffable — from which had originally flowed forth a creative energy and which now was sending out a power of re-creating all life. Such was the mysterious death of Sri Aurobindo. And it is this fount of new life that is enshrined in the Samadhi at the centre of the Ashram courtyard.

A most holy hush of infinite grace by whose radiant omnipotence of love everything could be blessed into an outgrowing of old forms that have become fetters — this is the Samadhi where both the Master and the Mother are laid — his casket the support of Hers, as it were, and both together symbolising a silence with the power to put an end to all past failures, to remove our futile frettings and unobtrusively, without the fanfare of even one word, bring about the beginnings of an earth discovering its own hidden divinity. There is nothing to be wondered at in one's being "so silent about the Samadhi" if one's wordless state reflects in however distant a measure the almighty secret hinted in that flower-decked incense-wreathed monument from where our Two Adored Ones waft to us mutely the message: "We are always with you!"

After this paean do not run away with the idea that one has to be within physical reach of the Samadhi all the time if not spend all one's hours sitting in front of it. No doubt, the Ashram has a special spiritual virtue, it is the central power-house of the Aurobindonian Yoga because here the Master and the Mother lived and their "material envelopes", sanctified by the lives led in them, are preserved. But the Master and the Mother were essentially realities of consciousness and it is with our consciousness that fundamentally we have to be in contact with them. Just as on *darshan* days people come to Pondicherry from all over the world, so too some physical touch with the resting-place of the Avatars' bodies is needed, but to conjure up the silence of the Samadhi within our souls is the basic need.

(8.6.1991)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(*Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, published by
The Integral Life Foundation, USA, 1995, pp. 203-05)

CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of November 2010)

Monday, 17 May 1926

This week was a little better than the previous ones; the mind and vital were more submissive and the meditation was easier. But there was nothing new or unusual. At times, when the mind is completely calm, it gives me the feeling of transparency, like jelly.

JELLY?

That is the word which best expresses what I mean.

Does the mind remain motionless by itself, without your putting pressure on it?

No, not yet; but there is an automatic inner movement that positions me as an observer in front of my mind.

This calm is necessary before calling down something higher, in order not to be disturbed by invading thoughts.

* * *

Monday, 24 May 1926

The difficulty always comes from the mechanical part of the mind. It clings to anything it can find — the small things of daily life, books, purchases, etc. — and embroiders and builds upon them. Nevertheless, there is a certain progress in the way I look at its activity: it seems more external.

You won't be able to free yourself completely from this mechanical activity until you have achieved the transformation of the physical. Till then you will be able to stop it at will, during meditation for instance. You will see it as outside yourself and have a certain influence over how it expresses itself, but you won't be entirely free from it.

I suppose I take too much interest in these things; that is what allows my mind to cling to them. The highest parts of my mind are dead; I no longer have any interest in spiritual books like the Bhagavad Gita and others. But this mechanical part still remains active.

Because it is the most difficult to deal with. Moreover, the physical consciousness always takes interest in these things and even if they were not in you, they fill the surrounding atmosphere. Unless one does as the Sannyasins do, one has to fight as you are doing. But this is rather a negative thing and you must not attach too much importance to it. A positive experience is more important — either the deep calm or the Light from above, and they will remove quite naturally the rest of this mechanical activity. This is what you must aim at.

Is there a centre near the heart?

No. All the centres are in a straight line. What is called the heart centre is at the solar plexus. Manipura is behind the navel. They are connected to the spinal column.

Steiner speaks of the solar plexus as well as of the heart centre.

It is a mistake.

My body is feeling the heat. These last few days I was tired. Also I did my meditation lying down. Is there any objection to that?

You can meditate in any position whatever. I often meditate while walking.

You spoke about going out in the vital body and in the mental body. What does the latter phrase mean?

When the vital body leaves the physical, the body remains in trance, but if it is only the mind, this doesn't happen. The mind goes out in meditation, for example, and visits certain places or planes; it can observe things there and even make itself felt. But it is not the whole mind that goes out, only a central portion, so to say. There are no dangers as in trance; if you are awakened, the mind comes back immediately without danger. It is not the same if the vital has gone out. A cord connects it to the physical; as it is the life, if this thread is cut, death results. An abrupt recall is also dangerous.

As a rule, it is better to acquire some experience of the mind's going out and a mental knowledge of the planes before trying to go out in the vital body.

So in this Yoga, going out in the mental body precedes going out in the vital body?

Yes, but even so, both are subordinate to the spiritual experience, which is far more important.

I understand that the spiritual experience is fundamental and that the rest is necessary simply because perfection must be achieved on all the planes.

* * *

Monday, 31 May 1926

My meditation is becoming deeper and more detached from the external world. At certain times I succeed in watching myself think. Thought still does not seem external to me, but even so I am able to consider this activity as separate. I am also quite aware that thought is an altogether superficial activity, and it does not affect the deep layers of my being, but remains on the surface.

When the meditation becomes deep, my feet start aching.

What kind of sensation do you have?

Both like a pressure and an uprooting. Could it be the vital being rising up to separate itself?

It may be that, or it may be a change that usually occurs when the divine force slowly transforms even the physical substance. This substance is impure and cannot receive the impulse without a preliminary transformation.

Is it physical matter itself that changes or the life of this matter?

It is a cellular change that takes place, especially in the vital and mental parts of the cells; but even physical matter shares in it.

In my meditations there are several inner attitudes I can take, and each one generates certain vital currents.

What attitudes, for instance?

I can try to take the position of witness of the mental activity; I can try to climb higher and hold on to the highest level of my being. I can call the Force from below. In my recent meditations, for example, I was centred not above the head but behind the solar plexus, in the depths and not on the heights.

That is the region of the psychic being, which is behind the heart (the solar plexus). It is one of the occult centres, the one that governs the ordinary man. You also have to become conscious in the centre above the head, from which the central being governs everything.

But aren't all these currents conflicting? I produce them blindly without knowing their effects. Which of these attitudes are right?

All, all are right. You have only to watch what happens. The solar centre and the centre in the head must cooperate in the perfect mastery of the instruments. Each has its role.

Should this attitude of witness of mental changes be held in all the circumstances of ordinary life? At the moment, under these conditions I can manage only less important, semi-automatic activities. As soon as a certain attentiveness is necessary, I get lost again in action.

But that is not inevitable — it is a question of habit. You have not yet overcome the illusion of seeing yourself as the doer. Of course, this witness attitude is necessary; it is a first step. All the parts of the mind can thus be made automatic. One watches them from above; one can stop them or alter them.

It is then a perfect mastery of the instruments. But in me this automatic activity is not yet sufficiently developed and I can entrust only less important tasks to it — though there is already some progress in this respect.

Monday, 7 June 1926

There are cycles in my meditations: good periods and others where it is more difficult. At present I can quiet the mind quite easily, detach myself from it and try to penetrate into a region that I sense above it. My mind now seems like a small portion of my true being. But above me there is a sort of veil that will not yield and it prevents me from passing beyond. Also, when I succeed in thus quieting the mind and trying to break through it, I am aware of a pain or rather a sensation in the feet and legs, which then draws the attention of my

being. I cannot separate myself from it, because the more effort I make, the stronger this sensation becomes.

In your physical consciousness there are parts that are holding you back. You may be aware of them or not, but when you try to pierce the veil they hold you back. You are not yet ready. Also, it is necessary for the Force from above to descend and prepare your lower consciousness. This veil can be crossed from below, but it is more difficult and everyone cannot do it. But if the Force descends from above, it can remove the veil. So the first necessity is to open yourself to this Force.

It means, then, that I should take a passive attitude and not try to centre my consciousness above.

The aim, of course, is to lift yourself above the mind, but the Force has to prepare what is still not ready. Even though the mind is calm, these imperfections are holding you back.

What is the difference between the psychic being behind the heart centre and the central being above the head? Are they two beings or one single being?

Naturally, from one point of view they are one. But your being, though one, is composed of many distinct beings. Just as your mental being is different from your physical being and vital being, so the psychic being, the soul, is different from the central being.

The psychic being is the transmitter that receives the light and transmits it to the lower personality. It is the being that remains at the back and governs the personality. The psychic being is in direct communication with the truth, which it organises and transmits to the outer being. The central being cannot organise the truth; it is above all evolution. It is the psychic being that develops spiritually through the different personalities.

Is it the central being, then, which is above space and time and behind what evolves through the successive personalities?

Yes. The psychic being is only the developing soul; it supports and prepares the personality. The central being has no direct action; it presides and watches.

Yesterday evening I dined at the Xs. I narrated how the house of C.S. had burnt down. Mme. X began to think over this accident. Suddenly she felt a very unpleasant emanation which she described as being reddish brown and nauseating. In fact, I too had an unpleasant feeling. Then I returned home and went out again to the seaside. Suddenly I became aware of the same unpleasant

sensation. It was as if some entity were trying to bring about something negative, and I felt that I had to remain attentive, on my guard. By keeping contact with my inner being, I was able to reject it easily.

As a matter of fact, she has written about it this morning. Mme. X is very sensitive to these influences. But there is no reason for you to become so, since you are not yet ready to work on the physical plane. It is infinitely better not to enter into contact with them, but to reject them.

She probably has no connection with C.S.'s affair; but all these influences stick together and to think of one calls up others.

Is it not an imagination?

No, there was probably nothing imaginative in it. But you should have nothing to do with these forces. Reject them forcefully; throw them far away from you.

I didn't try to enter into contact with them.

Some days ago, I dreamt that someone lifted up a snake with his stick. Then he told me, "Be careful, don't move, this snake is venomous." So I remained still and the snake passed by my side without touching me.

It was a warning. But there is no need to stir up snakes with a stick.

* * *

Monday, 14 June 1926

I try to understand the resistance that is in me. The only thing I do is to open myself to the Force from above and to surrender utterly. Every time the Force comes down I feel it going down to the solar plexus, and then at the level of the belly a resistance is felt that translates itself into a stiffness of the legs and a peculiar feeling in the feet and hands also.

Now I tried to see what part of the mind was connected with the resistance. It seems to me that it is the most material and physical part of the mind, the part that is busy with forms and the collection of forms, acquiring, dealing with objects, etc.

Yes, but that ought not to interfere with anything. This part of the mind, the physical mind, is useful and has to do its work. It is not bad unless it tries to impose its desire, but I suppose that is not the case here. What do you feel exactly? And you said you feel the Force outside yourself; don't you feel its workings inside also?

I feel it come down to the solar plexus, but nothing in the navel. Some time before I felt it also in the Muladhara. Now I don't feel it so distinctly, but there is no strict separation between inside and outside.

Two reasons for these sensations may be possible. First, the vitality of the limbs retires in deep meditation and as I am not yet accustomed to it I feel a little pain — or there is an obstacle in the path of the Force.

There is an obstacle in the form of the physical mind. It is often the case with minds accustomed to being too active. They are not plastic enough and they must wear out till they become fully passive to the divine Force. Gradually this opposition will be overcome if you go on surrendering to the Force.

Sometimes the Force, coming down, does not permeate all the chakras and the Light only descends up to what is ready. There is a partial enlightenment, which improves afterwards. That may be the case if some chakras remain untouched.

It seems to me also that I have to reject these lower movements of the mind unless they are necessary, and to submit to them as little as possible.

Exactly so. This rejection is necessary.

Should I do some work like the study of astrology now?

I would not advise it. For the present let the mind be quiet until the calm settles. Then afterwards comes the period when the mind changes its workings and work can be taken up as a field of action, to carry out the process.

The calm that I can, at certain times, produce in my mind is artificial, so to say. It is imposed by will and must be constantly watched so that no thought interferes — and it does not last long. But I know this is not the calm that has to come from above and settle in the mind. Nevertheless I always feel that the calm is very close and the veil is thin and grows thinner and thinner. But I may be wrong in my expectations?

You said last time that I was not ready. Does that mean that this part of the mind was not ready to admit the Force?

Yes.

Will it be overcome?

Certainly. What happened is this. When you came here, you took up the work with a very strong aspiration. But as usual, the defects of the mind rose by and by and now they have to be overcome.

That is true. From when I came till the coming of X was a period of hard work. Then with the coming of X, for many reasons, I relaxed my effort and my mind asserted itself again in the old ways. I have not yet regained the former eagerness and I am now trying to regain it.

That is exactly so.

I suppose there is no need to feel discouraged. I am not at all discouraged or even sad about this process taking so long a time.

No need at all.

When I came here you saw in me certain possibilities and also certain difficulties. Now is there any change in the outlook?

No.

I mean, do you think it will be possible for me to stay here?

Yes, certainly. I have the conviction you will stay here.

* * *

Monday, 21 June 1926

There is a slow improvement but no radical change yet. The pain in the legs has greatly diminished and I find less obstacles in the way of the Force coming down. But, nothing has changed. Truly I feel that a strong pressure is behind, which would, if unveiled, quickly stabilise the mind.

Do you feel it in the mind?

Yes, but I know it comes from above the mind.

Also, my mind has less tendency to busy itself with all sorts of things. The obstacle is always, it seems to me, the part of the mind that is active with the most outward aspect of things. For instance, the part of the mind that rejoices in making a collection of stamps. And I still have difficulty in withdrawing from it.

It is probably a small thing that holds you back, but it is very obstinate.

I wonder whether the pain in the legs was not due to tobacco smoking, for since I gave up tobacco ten days ago, the pain has decreased.

No, I don't think so. The craving for tobacco is more a vital desire and creates a vital obstacle. There is probably some resistance in the body itself.

But what is a little unusual is the resistance of the physical mind at this stage. Generally it comes at a later stage, and when it comes it is very obstinate. But in your case, it seems to be rising now; this may be due to the fact that we are all working in the physical mind and the resistance is there. All rises at the same time. You have to wear it out. That is all.

I know that I am doing the right thing and that I am on the right path, so there is no anxiety in my mind.

I always have great difficulty in separating from the physical body and my meditation is not deep. Every sound which is a little insistent or recurring catches my attention and breaks my meditation.

You need not be so disturbed. Is it not because you have a fixed idea that such a sound is able to disturb you? You could hear it without its leaving any impression in the mind. A part of the mind would know it, but the central part would not be in the least disturbed.

No doubt it is so. A feeble sound enters and goes on unnoticed, but once my attention is awakened, it is difficult to reject it quietly.

Which is easier to separate from my true self — the body or the mind?

When you are out of the body, you are in the true mind!

Sometimes I feel a part of my consciousness somewhere before my face, but as soon as I become aware of it, I rush back into my bodily consciousness. (A.G. smiles.)

* * *

Monday, 28 June 1926

Sometimes the activity of my mind is very painful. I feel tired and harassed by it. No doubt there is in me something that takes pleasure in this activity, for if there were none, it would cease of itself. But my conscious will and the greater part of my being reject it and want to be free. How is it that such a small part can victoriously oppose the process?

It may be a small part, but it played an important part in past evolution.

In the beginning of the week, meditation was good. I succeeded in separating from the mind entirely and keeping it quiet for a while. But the last days were not successful.

At times I feel harassed. Does the mental resistance not receive a support from the vital?

Yes, and from the physical also. The physical is the receptacle of the past habits and supports them. So too does the vital. Therefore no perfection is possible unless the vital is opened and the physical conquered.

But you should not insist so much upon the perfection of the mind. It cannot be perfect now — that is, quiet and luminous. But it must be sufficiently still to allow the Force to come down and work. That is what is especially needed.

Last Tuesday I felt as if a great sweetness (there is no better word) was hovering over me.

It is rather in that direction that you should go.

It means a more active surrender.

Yes. Not a mere negative effort in the mind. You should insist more upon the positive aspect. Negative blankness is not an end but a means.

How is it that even the faint experiences I had — light, deep calm of the mind — have receded and do not come back?

It happens like that. There is no continuous and regular unfolding, but alternations of light and darkness, ebb and flow. But the experiences have to become more and more frequent and prolonged, until they come at will and mastery is gained.

(To be continued)

PAVITRA

[From *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo* by Pavitra (Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire) published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry, 2007 being the English translation of *Conversations avec Pavitra*, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972.

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ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of November 2010)

Chapter X *(Continued)*

The Daily Routine of Spiritual Life

Pondicherry, July 26, 1931

Dear Maman,

Here are the photos mentioned in my last letter; I do not find them too bad. Since they were taken, the workshop has already undergone important modifications: I have installed an electric motor for the machine tools to which have been added a drill and a filing-vice (shaper).

I have just overhauled our Renault completely after having dismantled it into small parts. I shall next take up the other cars one by one: the Lorraine, the Fiat and the Grand-six. Our fifth car has been written off: it was no longer usable and it consumed too much petrol. I have therefore quite a lot on my plate!

I often remember our tiny Panhard and the good rides that we had in it. It really was a good car and, considering its size, I have not seen its equal. Perhaps improvements have been made in the details, above all in the accessories, but has a better car been made?

What car do you have at present?

I wish we had a Delage, a saloon, for Sri Aurobindo and Mother, because of the sun; but the non-availability of spares in India will be a disadvantage, and, in case a part has to be replaced, to get it from France will take very long. The American cars are, from this point of view, more convenient: even Fiat has put in place a system of agents whereas we do not have any stockist in the whole of India for the Renault.

The buildings are coming up little by little; the ones in the process of construction are not bad but I hope we shall do better in future.

Pondicherry hardly changes. Recently we had elections here, with the traditional accompaniment of brawls and clashes, things of no interest, and from which we keep ourselves scrupulously apart.

Anyway, our inner life is luminous and peaceful; our yoga proceeds normally

towards a greater consciousness and harmony.

I am very happy to learn that your health is better. My loving thoughts often fly towards you, but it is so difficult to communicate what one feels deeply, something different from just a superficial and conventional emotion.

I embrace you affectionately.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

December 2, 1931

My very dear Parents,

Another year is nearing its end! The Japanese, who love short and suggestive poems and aphorisms, have written many on the subject of the New Year. I remember one of them: *Sen-ri no tabi; tchi-ri zuka* (In a voyage of a thousand leagues, the inn is at every league). On most of the Japanese roads, one can find, in fact, tea houses close enough to rest and refresh oneself every few miles. The Japanese have a very strong feeling of the impermanence of people and things, of the continuous flux, of the perpetual change and renewal, and in them they feel a poetic melancholy.

For the Hindus, time is nothing but an appearance of the duration and is a part of the illusion of the world, or rather of the false aspect which our limited consciousness gives to the world. For them, past, present and future are arbitrary divisions of the eternity.

For the Westerners, time has this character of inevitable fate that the Greeks gave to it, to which has since been added the sense of a concrete and almost material value of time (*time is money*¹); the passing of time easily gives them the impression of a diminution, an impoverishment, as though they were losing something of which they have only a limited supply.

The three viewpoints are quite different; there must be others too. This diversity comes, I think, from the difference of the levels where the consciousness is centred. If one can grasp this difference, one has the key to the specific reactions of the people and even of the individuals, their behaviour and way of life. I recently read a book which I have found quite interesting: Keyserling's *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*. I had read it in English earlier but I have re-read it in its French translation which is quite recent. There are many things which I would not see as he sees them and our approach to life differs much. However, I have found in this book many observations on the peoples, the races and other things which seem to me to be

1. In English in the original.

correct. For example, I very much liked the opposition that he brings out between progress and perfection; there are several pages I could quote but it would really be very long (pages 149 onwards of Volume I). There is also (page 310) the exact expression of the difference between the occidental and the Hindu methods of acquiring knowledge. I recommend this book to Papa. The pages on Japan and China too are worth reading.

Perhaps you will ask me why I talk to you about all this. There is no special reason. This evening I have decided to chat with you and I have begun the conversation by evoking the New Year; then I have just let my thought run.

I have always told Papa that of the works of Sri Aurobindo there is nothing in French, except the seven issues of *Arya* which I have sent him and which are purely philosophical. Also I thought that he would like to read the *Conversations of the Mother* which have just been translated into French. To tell the truth, they are not Sri Aurobindo's but the Mother's, but it is all one.

They must be read keeping in mind what they are: advice and practical explanations given to the disciples. These are oral answers given to the questions asked by the novices of yoga, noted down and put together later. Papa will not find here any attempt to convince the listener nor to provide any purely intellectual proof because it is experience which is the real proof in yoga. To some pages he will perhaps react strongly; but in spite of everything, I think he will find the reading interesting on the whole because the goal that we wish to realise and the path that leads to it are described there. I shall send him the other *Conversations* as and when they are ready.

From the material point of view, health, occupations, etc., on my side, I do not find anything worthwhile to report; I would only be repeating what my previous letters said.

I have received Maman's letter sent from Bourbonne and I hope that her health has improved since then. You will surely be in Paris at the end of the year, where this letter will find you. I hope that you will go and spend some time in Le Midi. It gives me the shivers to think of the winter in Paris; it is 24-25°C here at present and we find it cool!

I think of you very often, dear parents, and always with gratitude and affection. I am sorry that circumstances have separated us, but I would like that at least inwardly you do not feel separated from me.

I send you all my best wishes, wishes for health, for peace, for light, in the New Year, and I embrace you very affectionately.

Signed: Philippe

Pondicherry, December 30, 1931

My dear Parents,

I thought of writing a little note to you on the first of January, but the post goes tomorrow and, so as not to wait another week, I hastily scrawl this page which accompanies the *Conversations with the Mother* nos. 5, 6 and 7. If you could read them on the first of January itself, you would have lived, so to say, a few hours near me, in the stream of our thoughts and our aspirations.

The first consignment ought to have reached you for Christmas, so that you could have it for the festival. It is a little of me that you will have near you, the best part of me. Perhaps you will not find much of the Philippe you brought up and knew! But what is each one of us composed of? What is the most enduring part in us, that something which we have the most reason to call the individual? Is it composed of the habits, the atavisms, which form the exterior-most layer, or is it the central source of all that seeks ceaselessly to express itself most perfectly, that in us which aspires for perfection? I think that it is only when, through the outer layer, one can get in touch with this inner core that one succeeds in knowing, in really understanding another person, because one identifies oneself in a certain manner with that and what it represents in the universe.

This is not philosophy but something very concrete and very practical.

I should like very much, dear Papa and Maman, that you would give up all your anxiety about me. I have the firm conviction of being where I should be and doing what I should be doing . . . What more can one ask for? Is it not the only solid base of happiness that men seek on all sides, except where it really is: in the effective union with the divine consciousness in each of us? Obedience and submission to the inner voice brings as a result the "peace of a tranquil consciousness"; that is the first step and it is already something. But there is something much more positive in the union with the divine, even in its first phases. It is difficult to give an idea of what it is to somebody who is not a mystic.

I know that it may seem difficult for you not to worry about my future. However I can assure you that it is in good hands.

Besides, on the threshold of the year 1932, does the future of Europe seem to be so bright? Even from the most external point of view, will the possession of material goods or of a high social position guarantee earthly happiness? I assure you that I do not see anybody in the world I should like to change places with, certainly not! All that I can say on this subject is too weak: the strong terms I would like to use would perhaps shock you. So, I stop here.

I think of you and I embrace you, your

Signed: Philippe

* * *

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Tel. Adr.
AUROBINDO — PONDICHERRY

PONDICHERRY
India²

February 6, 1932

My very dear Parents,

Your letter of mid-December, even though stamped adequately for the air mail, was not marked "By Air Mail"; so it reached me by ordinary post.

Yes, I know, France is beginning to be affected by the world crisis. And yet France is certainly in a privileged situation; but too many ties bind the countries to one another. And perhaps the causes of the crisis exist also in France as in the other countries.

All the same, that after fifty years of industrial organisation, unrestricted utilisation of all the natural resources: coal, oil, forests, animals, etc., we are about two steps from a general bankruptcy and that one is compelled to throw into the sea or burn wheat, coffee, cotton, while in other places so many men suffer from misery and hunger — this clearly reveals the failure — even in the economic field — of our civilisation based on material progress. And again, that is not all! Wherever one turns, one sees nothing but disorder, confusion, unrest, intrigue, conflict, war, instead of peace and abundance which should have followed the mastery by science of the forces of nature. No doubt, it is the wrong use we have made of this power and of this wealth which has brought about this imbalance in nature and mankind.

What will come of it? It seems to me that the roots of evil are much too deep for a simple economic crisis to redress the mistakes of the past. Human mind must accept the lesson, must recognise the existence of other values, higher and truer, than those which it has placed on the forefront of his preoccupations. The power that man has gained over nature is such that every mistake has consequences infinitely more serious than in the past. And he imagines he can rule over everything according to his whim! Also more and more he seems to be tying himself in knots, because the last desperate attempts to resolve the social and economic difficulties — fascism and bolshevism — contain the same errors pushed to the extreme.

Will the Western world emerge from it, will it find the way to salvation? Or will it collapse in the last convulsions? Or again, will it slowly fade away before a new world, a civilisation emerging from other races? It is much more than I can say, and much more than we need to know. One thing seems certain to me, it will lose the prominence that its advance in the material progress has given it. In the building of the future world, it will only play a small part — small compared to the place that it

2. This letter is the first one to be typed out on an Ashram letterhead.

occupied yesterday in the world and which it had secured for itself by its practical intelligence and its scientific conquests put to the service of its instinct of domination — but evidently normal if one judges it by the actual contribution which it is bringing to the world which is being born.

The fall of Western civilisation — in one way or the other — is certainly not the remedy, the panacea which will automatically cure all the ills of the world. Besides all the countries are more or less contaminated and they are linked to one another in such a way that each serious crisis will have its repercussion on the whole world. This fall may be an inevitable consequence and the removal of an obstacle; it is not a punishment. In any case, that will only be the destructive part. For a new order to emerge or to be shaped out of the present chaos, something new, a truly new principle of knowledge and action is needed. Without that, there is no hope of getting out of the circle!

I hope that you will not suffer much from this crisis. It seems to me that the way Papa has succeeded in providing for your material life, is a guarantee of security. In this regard you run less risk than almost all those who depend for their livelihood either on an industry, or a profession or a craft, or from the revenue of an acquired wealth. You must not take a gloomy view of things and above all must not make a common cause — even in thought — with what may be about to disappear.

I now reply to a few passages in Papa's letter.

You think that world events hardly touch me — these are your own words. It is true, but it needs to be explained. If we do not take direct interest in these events, it is because we do not wish **either to participate in them, or to be swept away by them**. Sri Aurobindo thinks that it is absolutely useless to spread ourselves in the world in order to preach a new religion, to do philanthropic and social works, or to introduce a new form of government. This has never served any great purpose, because it has never changed humanity.

Up to a certain point then, we are rather spectators but not idle spectators, interested only in what concerns them without taking part. We know very well what we wish to do — what we have to do — and as it is a difficult thing, it engages a major part of our attention. What is happening outside is not directly connected with our present work and so is not of prime importance for us.

Apart from these reasons, why should we be “touched” by these events? A mystic, for whom the inner world is as real as, if not more than, the outer world, certainly does not see things in the same way as an ordinary man who does not accept any reality other than the tangible world. The contact with the Divine, if it is well established, gives precisely this equanimity of soul which is the basis of a sound spiritual development. Everything that happens is observed, studied, but held at a distance from the inner life, so as not to permit the waves of disharmony to trouble the inner peace. Selfish attitude, one may say! But how? Could anybody

bring to the world the peace and the light which it lacks, by letting himself be overcome by a wild agitation? Is it not the contrary which is true?

Whatever it may be, I can assure you that Sri Aurobindo and Mother keep themselves abreast of **everything** that happens in the world, in all the domains. And I too still read sufficiently, mainly what may bring me an impartial and correct information about the development of ideas and the march of events.

From a Reading Society, I receive almost all the current periodicals. The other works which it circulates are chosen for the average reader and consist above all of novels and romanticised life; of these I read very little. Philosophical, social or scientific studies hardly reach us. Whatever you consider may be of interest to me, will be gladly received; and I too shall let you know what I have read and what, according to the reviews, would seem to me worth reading.

Like you, I have not been carried away by Le Roy's book on the problem of God. The first part, where he shows the void in the intellectual demonstrations of the existence of God, is good; but the part where, in his turn, he takes up the problem, did not seem to me any better than the demonstrations of his precursors. When he had admitted that "God is not to be proved but is to be lived", he would have done better to give up his so-called proofs — but that would be asking too much of a philosopher!

It goes without saying that I am interested in all the scientific questions mainly in the recent theories in Physics and Mechanics: relativity, quanta, wave mechanics, astrophysics. And I often lament my not being able to read certain works, but most of them are much too technical and would not interest me. However, I mention two books which present these ideas to the lay public and of which I have heard the highest praise, above all of the first one:

Eddington: *The Nature of the Physical World* (Payot);

James Jeans: *The Universe* (Publisher ?).

You say that the mysticism that Mother reveals in her *Conversations* is the brother of Christian mysticism and that it seems to be quite removed from the Indian point of view.

It is certain that, if there is any truth in mysticism, it must find itself in all its specific forms and that all mysticisms must necessarily be "brothers" — of this I am certain as are those who have made a comparative study of them. There is a universal mysticism whose elements different religions have tried to appropriate for themselves by deforming them and by confining them within their dogmatic and religious frameworks.

Different mysticisms give more importance to one element or another, but these are only superficial differences and, beneath the surface, one can easily perceive the same stream of spiritual life. Besides, even the differences are not as sharp as we think. Christian mysticism is mainly devotional; but it does not have a monopoly on

devotion. The Hindus are, on the whole, much more devotional than the Christians and a whole section of Hinduism has carried devotion to a point which has not been surpassed even by the most intense Catholic ecstasies. I am speaking of the emotional *bhakti* (devotion) of the Vaishnavites (devotees of Vishnu).

We generally think that India is entirely Buddhist and Vedantist. The former represents the Indian religious temperament so little that it has almost disappeared from India proper, surviving only in Burma and Ceylon.³ As for Vedantism, it is the philosophical exposition of the inner experience of Unity; if we separate it from experience, as of necessity do those who study it from outside, without living it, it becomes an intellectual doctrine and loses its life and its truth. In reality, Hindu religious life, even though traditionally linked to the *Vedas*, has infinite variations. It has a wealth of form and expression in which one is easily lost, above all if there one tries to impose separations and compartments. It is a grand whole, ever-changing, full of intermingling and blending nuances.

As for our yoga, it is different from the traditional Hindu yoga, although it takes the latter for its base and starting point. Even that is not absolutely correct, because the true base of our yoga is the inner experience of Sri Aurobindo. Only, before arriving at the personal and novel part of his yoga, he has gone through, practised or studied all the forms of Hindu yoga; he has made a synthesis of them and it is from this synthesis that he has set forth; that is his starting point. From there much ground has been covered.

Mother is evidently western by birth and education, but the disciplines that she has followed are those of the Hebrew tradition and of Buddhism; she has never taken any particular interest in Christianity. The instructions in question have been given by Mother above all for some European novices; the same ideas would evidently have taken a different form had they been addressed to Hindus.

In the ideas themselves, there is nothing that may specifically be termed Christian. There is even an essential point on which we completely differ from Christian mysticism: it is the role and necessity of **suffering**. For us it is neither a grace, nor a necessity, nor an atonement, nor even a test. Suffering does not confer "merits" on us and has no redeeming value for the world, and on top of it, in no way does it please God. Very simply it shows a resistance to the transformation, a false or erroneous movement, and it has almost the same role as heat in a machine. When some part in an automobile heats up, it indicates an abnormal friction which must be removed. Suffering, therefore, is not without its use, but it is not necessary either, and one can very well pursue a harmonious development in peace and joy.

The mysticism of suffering belongs solely to Christianity. For us it is a vital perversion and we do not accord it any place.

Today I am sending you the *Conversations* nos. 8 and 9.

3. Modern day Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

On my side I have nothing to report. The weather is magnificent, absolutely “Côte d’azur”. Here it is the best season; there is respite from the heat, and, at 25° C it is quite cool.

I leave you for now and I embrace you very lovingly.

Your

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.)

This is the beginning of a growing spiritual experience which reveals to him more and more that what seemed to him dark incomprehensible Maya was all the time no other than the Consciousness-Puissance of the Eternal, timeless and illimitable beyond the universe, but spread out here under a mask of bright and dark opposites for the miracle of the slow manifestation of the Divine in Mind and Life and Matter. All the Timeless presses towards the play in Time; all in Time turns upon and around the timeless Spirit. If the separate experience was liberative, this unitive experience is dynamic and effective. For he now not only feels himself to be in his soul-substance part of the Eternal, in his essential self and spirit entirely one with the Eternal, but in his active nature an instrumentation of its omniscient and omnipotent Consciousness-Puissance.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 121)

THE NOTION OF PROGRESS IN DARWINIAN THEORY

(Continued from the issue of November 2010)

Summing Up Neo-Darwinist Positions

WHILE the above is not an exhaustive representation of the neo-Darwinist positions, it represents the viewpoints of some of its most respected proponents. We find a great diversity of trends in the “interpretation of data” leading to viewpoints which, while subscribing to the same broad theoretical framework, are quite different in the conclusions they draw regarding evolutionary phenomena.

While S. J. Gould insists on a complete randomness in the evolution of life-forms since differential survival is tied to the immediate environment which in itself is unpredictable (and hence aids randomness), his arch rival and one of the most prolific writers on evolution, Richard Dawkins talks of evolutionary progress in short periods of stability due to co-evolution e.g. predator-prey relationships. At the same time Dawkins believes that over geological time life has made important breakthroughs that improve the ability of life-forms to evolve further.

Ernst Mayr points out that while evolution does depend on random mutations for the generation of variation, the second step — “selection” — is not entirely random. While Mayr rejects any goal-directedness (or finalism) in evolution, he does accept that certain trends such as increased parental care may be termed as progress. Moreover, he differs from Dawkins in respect to the inclusive-fitness altruism leading to true ethics in homo sapiens.

Gould and Eldredge’s punctuated-equilibrium theory places randomness in the context of geological time. The theory implies that in the long run, due to mass extinctions which wipe out life forms indiscriminately (fit or otherwise), the trends are essentially seen only between these catastrophic events. Seen across geological time, life’s journey will still be random. This view is critiqued by Robert Wright who points out that since all life represents a branching, there is a lot of technology (by way of DNA) that life-forms share and every fresh start after an extinction will see these survival mechanisms being re-invented and the broad direction of life will be the same. Moreover, who knows, the growth of conscious thought and the corresponding growth of knowledge may one day be able to avoid such extinction events altogether?

E. O. Wilson points out that despite all extinctions, life has been gradually expanding into all available niches and we are now on a bio-diversity peak. This enfoldment of life despite all odds is for him progressive. Christian de Duve offers

a more stringent criticism of randomness, pointing out that even the first step of random mutations is not as random as it is made out to be and the play of randomness in evolution has been overplayed. He points out that the nature of evolution makes it near certain that conscious thought and intelligence would emerge sooner or later, purely as biological phenomena, since as an extension of sensory technology it offers great survival advantages.

Sri Aurobindo

We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness.

(Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA Vol. 21, p. 5)

Sri Aurobindo's core idea of evolution as an emergence of Life from Matter, Mind from Life and Supramental truth-consciousness from Mind should be the starting point of looking critically at the Darwinian theory of evolution in the light of his philosophy. Not only is his system different in the sense of being teleological, for in his philosophy, evolution, being a gradual emergence of that which is self-involved in Matter, is goal-directed, even in its details, the laws that apply to one stage of evolution will not apply to the next since the lower stage does not constitute the higher as is the case with the reductionist thesis that Science accepts. Yet even with this fundamental difference, he accepts the Darwinian theory of evolution as representing the truth of a particular stage of evolution. In order to look at the place that Darwin's theory occupies in his system we need to start with Life, or to be more precise, at the three terms of Life.

The First Terms of Life

The first terms of Life are division, a force-driven subconscious will, apparent not as will but as dumb urge of physical energy, and the impotence of an inert subjection to the mechanical forces that govern the interchange between the form and its environment. This inconscience and this blind but potent action of Energy are the type of the material universe as the physical scientist sees it and this his view of things extends and turns into the whole of basic existence; . . .

(*Ibid.*, p. 211)

The initial forms of matter, the atoms and the elements they constitute, are extremely rigid and defy both death and dissolution. This rigidity and lasting quality is exactly what allows the operation of fixed physical laws on matter and allows the creation of physical sciences which can predict and measure the behaviour of matter to a high level of accuracy. Matter is the constituent of all that Life is to create during the course of evolution and this extreme rigidity allows a firm base for creating the superstructure of Life. However, the master principle of Nature is not division but unity, and nature forces that on these initial forms of matter by forcing it to merge into aggregates. Sri Aurobindo writes,

Therefore, if Nature for her own ends, in order principally to have a firm basis for her combinations and a fixed seed of forms, allows the atom ordinarily to resist the process of fusion by dissolution, she compels it to subserve the process of fusion by aggregation; the atom, as it is the first aggregate, is also the first basis of aggregate unities. (*Ibid.*, p. 213)

The Middle Terms of Life

. . . the middle terms of Life are death and mutual devouring, hunger and conscious desire, the sense of a limited room and capacity and the struggle to increase, to expand, to conquer and to possess. These three terms are the basis of that status of evolution which the Darwinian theory first made plain to human knowledge. For the phenomenon of death involves in itself a struggle to survive, . . . (*Ibid.*, p. 211)

He adds further,

The struggle for life is not only a struggle to survive, it is also a struggle for possession and perfection, since only by taking hold of the environment whether more or less, whether by self-adaptation to it or by adapting it to oneself either by accepting or conciliating it or by conquering and changing it, can survival be secured, . . . It is this truth that Darwinism sought to express in the formula of the survival of the fittest. (*Ibid.*, pp. 211-12)

These middle terms, as Sri Aurobindo points out, are the basis of the Darwinian theory. The stage is marked by the profuse outflowing of life seen in the creation of myriad forms, seeking to possess every possible niche, developing technologies for fitness and survival and in the process creating and dissolving forms, bodies, species and lineages. This is the stage that is driven by hunger and death (or rather the fear of death) where the constituents of Life

are broken up so that the elements of one life can be used to enter into the elemental formation of other lives. (*Ibid.*, p. 213)

For a long time the Darwinian mode of evolution was assumed to have been the one and the only mechanism of production of new life-forms. It is only in the last decades of the twentieth century that certain scientists challenged this view on the basis of their study of evolution in micro-organisms and it is now more or less accepted that the initial evolutionary mechanism may have been primarily non-Darwinian. Evolution then seems to have had two distinct phases — one driven primarily by Hunger and the second driven by Death. Sri Aurobindo, pointing to the Upanishadic formula writes,

Life, says the Upanishad, is Hunger which is Death, and by this Hunger which is Death, *aśanāyā mṛtyuḥ*, the material world has been created. (*Ibid.*, p. 206)

Evolution Driven by Hunger

The energy of life in the body has to support the attack of the energies external to it in the universe; it has to draw them in and feed upon them and is itself being constantly devoured by them. All Matter according to the Upanishad is food, and this is the formula of the material world that “the eater eating is himself eaten”. The life organised in the body is constantly exposed to the possibility of being broken up by the attack of the life external to it or, its devouring capacity being insufficient or not properly served or there being no right balance between the capacity of devouring and the capacity or necessity of providing food for the life outside, it is unable to protect itself and is devoured or is unable to renew itself and therefore wasted away or broken; it has to go through the process of death for a new construction or renewal. (*Ibid.*, p. 204)

It appears that the first mutable aggregates, bacteria, were so simple and fluid that they could swap DNA with each other. The mutability of the DNA, itself an aggregate of invariable atoms and the basis of aggregate unities (in this case living bodies) is nothing but a fitting raw material for this will to possess and perfect. An extremely plastic molecule mutating under the influence of cosmic rays is a basis of the extreme number of permutations and combinations that Life needs to create forms that seek to possess the earth.

The gradual conquest of Life and the development of technology that allowed life to prosper and continue its march would not have been possible without the extremely mutable life-forms that inhabited the early earth, that utilise an even more powerful evolutionary mechanism combined with random mutations and perhaps

this is what is truly implied by S. J. Gould's expression, "The Planet of the Bacteria". These earliest forms of life were so mutable that several scientists refuse to classify them into species (a situation as exceptional as that of a priest refusing to read the scripture). The reason is that unlike higher life-forms (or later life-forms), these early ancestors had the capacity to exchange DNA (the molecule responsible for heredity) directly with each other. In their seminal work, *What is Life*, Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan explain,

Members of familiar species of plants and animals reproduce "vertically", as mother and father donate an equal number of genes (on chromosomes) to form new offspring. Bacteria are under no such constraint. Rather, bacteria trade genes "horizontally" acquiring new genes from peers in their own generation. (Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, *What is Life*, University of California Press, 1995, 2002, p. 94)

This gives a very powerful tool to evolution since it allows a rapid exchange of technology and dispersal of evolutionary gains. Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan write,

Understanding evolution's inner workings requires understanding of the full range of life's possibilities. In the flexibility, cosmopolitan virtuosity, and sophisticated strategies of bacteria we can begin to appreciate evolutionary complexity in its great glory. . . . The speed, volume, and antiquity of bacterial gene-trading activities underlie the evolution of all the rest of life on Earth. (Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, *Acquiring Genomes*, Basic Books, 2002, p. 85)

In her book, *Symbiotic Planet — a new look at evolution*, Lynn Margulis describes the alternate evolutionary mechanism — Symbiogenesis and the related SET theory (Serial Endosymbiosis Theory) at a pace and gripping suspense of a scientific whodunnit. Symbiogenesis is described as

evolutionary change by the inheritance of acquired gene sets. (Lynn Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet*, Basic Books, 1998, pp. 8-9)

It all started when DNA was found outside the nucleus (which was considered to be the sole repository of the genetic material, DNA) i.e. in the cytoplasm of the cells. While the orthodox (neo-Darwinist) position was that the cytoplasmic DNA could be ignored for the purpose of heredity, some thought otherwise. The main organelles, inside the cell but outside the nucleus, which contained DNA were **plastids** (which are critical to photosynthesis), **cilia** (which allow certain cells to swim) and **mitochondria** (described as cellular power plants, since they produce ATP, the source of energy in our bodies). Before long it was hypothesised that,

non-nuclear cell parts, with their own peculiar heredity, were remnant forms of once free-living bacteria (*Ibid.*, p. 25)

To Margulis these three organelles, plastids, cilia and mitochondria, resembled bacteria in their behaviour and metabolism and she says that in certain cases it is nearly impossible to distinguish between a bacterium (blue-green bacteria) inside the plant cell and the plastids. Spurred by her observations, Margulis worked out her thesis in which she showed that

Four, once entirely independent and physically separate ancestors, merged in a specific order to become the green algal cell. All four were bacteria. Each of the four bacteria types differed in ways we can still infer. In both, merged and free living forms, the descendants of all four kinds of bacteria still live today (*Ibid.*, p. 34)

Through analysis of bacterial DNA and independent tests, Margulis' thesis is now widely accepted (for 3 of the 4 proposed mergers).

Needless to say that Symbiogenesis and the SET theory have redefined evolutionary history of the planet. Not only is the mechanism of merger completely non-Darwinian (some would be tempted to call it co-operation as opposed to competition, but Margulis cautions against such anthropomorphic language), her thesis flies in the face of the neo-Darwinist basis of an individual who competes and survives against other individuals, for if our cells owe their genesis to bacterial mergers, we are not individuals but literally "aggregates".

What drives these mergers? According to Margulis, it is hunger, a search for food. One organism tries to ingest and digest the other. Most of the time the ingested organism is digested but often (these organisms are on the same size scales in the case of bacteria) the ingested organism resists digestion. This leads to trapped populations. In some cases the trapped populations are lost but in many cases (and this is relevant to the formation of the eukaryotic cells) the trapped populations are incorporated in the cellular metabolism of the predator. Hence the entire genome (DNA) is inherited by the daughter populations leading to fused and novel entities. Hence new entities arose by literally eating each other.

It is not surprising that Gould, in his statistically driven analysis, gave primacy to bacteria both for numbers and role in evolutionary saga. It also explains the continued march of Life despite extinctions and Life's genius in rebuilding what is lost. The forms are incidental, a localised attempt to test the gains of evolution, the repertoire of evolution's tricks lying incipient in all the life-forms and most of all in those extremely fluid entities, bacteria, so the loss can be easily made up through gene exchange and heredity, allowing Life to bounce back time and again, leading to a peak of bio-diversity as Wilson pointed out. Perhaps, de Duve expressed this

most clearly in his metaphor of the tree where Life is a central tree trunk, predestined in its evolutionary journey, and the various forms are its outer twigs, variations on a theme, aiding and testing survival and perfection of Life.

Mark Buchanan writing in the journal *New Scientist* quotes Goldenfeld, a scientist who has worked on horizontal gene transfer and its role in preserving the unified genetic machinery that underpins all Life:

Goldenfeld admits that pinning down the details of that early process remains a difficult task. However the simulations suggest that horizontal gene transfer allowed life in general to acquire a unified genetic machinery, thereby making the sharing of innovations easier. Hence, the researchers now suspect that early evolution may have proceeded through a series of stages before the Darwinian form emerged, with the first stage leading to the emergence of a universal genetic code. "It would have acted as an innovation-sharing protocol," says Goldenfeld, "greatly enhancing the ability of organisms to share genetic innovations that were beneficial." Following this, a second stage of evolution would have involved rampant horizontal gene transfer, made possible by the shared genetic machinery, and leading to a rapid, exponential rise in the complexity of organisms. This, in turn, would eventually have given way to a third stage of evolution in which genetic transfer became mostly vertical, perhaps because the complexity of organisms reached a threshold requiring a more circumscribed flow of genes to preserve correct function. (<http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg20527441.500-horizontal-and-vertical-the-evolution-of-evolution.html> 26 January 2010 by Mark Buchanan)

Evolution Driven by Death

Once evolution was able to create more stable and larger forms, Death became the primary means of creating new forms of life and this evolutionary stage was driven by the Darwinian principle of "survival of the fittest". Here Death both drew the evolutionary trajectory by enforcing a law where the fittest could survive thereby driving life forms to master the biosphere in new ways and invent survival strategies and at the same time provided material for creation of newer life-forms. In Sri Aurobindo's world view, Life is not opposed by Death, in fact Death can only be understood as a process of Life. Pre-Darwinian world, inhabited by bacteria had no death — bacteria procreate by splitting and are virtually deathless (which is not saying that they cannot be killed, but that death has no meaning in their life cycle). It is only when the larger life aggregates evolved (the prokaryotic cell to be precise) that death evolved as a means of dissolution of the life-forms. He writes,

When we study this Life as it manifests itself upon earth with Matter as its basis, we observe that essentially it is a form of the one cosmic Energy, a dynamic movement or current of it positive and negative, a constant act or play of the Force which builds up forms, energises them by a continual stream of stimulation and maintains them by an unceasing process of disintegration and renewal of their substance. This would tend to show that the natural opposition we make between death and life is an error of our mentality, one of those false oppositions — false to inner truth though valid in surface practical experience — which, deceived by appearances, it is constantly bringing into the universal unity. Death has no reality except as a process of life. Disintegration of substance and renewal of substance, maintenance of form and change of form are the constant process of life; death is merely a rapid disintegration subservient to life's necessity of change and variation of formal experience. Even in the death of the body there is no cessation of Life, only the material of one form of life is broken up to serve as material for other forms of life. (Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 188)

The extreme rigidity of the first atoms and the fluidity of the aggregates, other than serving the purpose of helping the perfection of life, also serve to allow the exchange and continuation of vital and mental energy. Death not only recycles the material our bodies are made of but also our desires, ideas, passions and other creations of our vital and mental existence. This aspect of death has not yet been sufficiently explored by science and indeed it cannot be till the understanding of our mind and its workings are at least as developed as our understanding of matter. Sri Aurobindo writes,

The extent to which this law reigns in Nature has not yet been fully recognised and indeed cannot be until we have a science of mental life and spiritual existence as sound as our present science of physical life and the existence of Matter. Still we can see broadly that not only the elements of our physical body, but those of our subtler vital being, our life-energy, our desire-energy, our powers, strivings, passions enter both during our life and after our death into the life-existence of others. An ancient occult knowledge tells us that we have a vital frame as well as a physical and this too is after death dissolved and lends itself to the constitution of other vital bodies; our life energies while we live are continually mixing with the energies of other beings. A similar law governs the mutual relations of our mental life with the mental life of other thinking creatures. There is a constant dissolution and dispersion and a reconstruction effected by the shock of mind upon mind with a constant interchange and fusion of elements. Interchange, intermixture and fusion of being with being, is the very process of life, a law of its existence.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 213-14)

(*To be concluded*)

DETERMINATION AND WILL — DOUGLAS BADER, CHURCHILL AND THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

(Continued from the issue of November 2010)

BESIDES being eloquent and a fearless, towering personality Churchill was also a great wit. When Lady Astor, a British MP and Churchill critic said to him, “If I were married to you, I’d put poison in your coffee.” Churchill reportedly retorted, “And if I were married to you, I’d drink it.”

He once commented on his Deputy Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, “He is a modest man who has a great deal to be modest about.”

Once during a political campaign he was told by a voter that he would rather vote for the devil than for him. Churchill’s riposte was, “I understand. But in case your friend is not running, can I count on your support?”

On another occasion he said of a garrulous MP at the House of Commons, “I can well understand the honourable member wishing to speak on. He needs the practice badly.”

The Mother was once questioned how Churchill could be Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s instrument when he had no intention of liquidating the British Empire. She replied:

But leave all that to the Divine. Churchill is a human being. He is not a yogi aspiring to transform his nature. Today he represents the Soul of the Nation that is fighting against the Asuras. He is being guided by the Divine directly and his soul is responding magnificently. All concentration must be now to help the Allies for the victory that is ultimately assured, but there must be no looseness, not the slightest opening to the Asuras. After the battle is won, if Churchill’s soul can remain still in front and he continues to be guided by the Divine, he will go very fast in the line of evolution. But generally on earth it doesn’t happen like that. His human mind and vital will take the lead after the crisis is over, and then he will come down to the level of the ordinary human being, though of a higher order. (TY,¹ pp. 128-29)

Writing on the greatness of an individual, Sri Aurobindo states:

. . . When a man seems to have rejected his work, it merely means that his work is over and Kali leaves him for another. When a man who has carried out

1. Nirodbaran: *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000 edition; abbreviated to TY.

a great work is destroyed, it is for the egoism by which he has misused the force within that the force itself breaks him to pieces, as it broke Napoleon. Some instruments are treasured up, some are flung aside and shattered, but all are instruments. This is the greatness of great men, not that by their own strength they can determine great events, but that they are serviceable and specially-forged instruments of the Power which determines them. Mirabeau helped to create the French Revolution, no man more. When he set himself against it and strove, becoming a prop of monarchy, to hold back the wheel, did the French Revolution stop for the backsliding of France's mightiest? Kali put her foot on Mirabeau and he disappeared; but the Revolution went on, for the Revolution was the manifestation of the Zeitgeist, the Revolution was the will of God.

So it is always. The men who prided themselves that great events were their work, because they seemed to have an initial hand in them, go down into the trench of Time and others march forward over their shattered reputations. Those who are swept forward by Kali within them and make no terms with Fate, they alone survive. The greatness of individuals is the greatness of the eternal Energy within. (CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 32)

Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo had written of great men:

. . . the greatest men of action the world has known were believers in Fate or in a divine Will. Caesar, Mahomet, Napoleon, what more colossal workers has our past than these? The superman believes more readily in Destiny, feels more vitally conscious of God than the average human mind.

(*Ibid.*, p. 160)

Besides the pressures of the war, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had to cope with some unreasonable disciples. When told that some Ashramites believed in Hitler, Sri Aurobindo retorted:

And these people pretend to do Yoga? . . . If this Asuric influence acting through Hitler is being cast on the Ashram too, it is dangerous.

(20 July 1940, *TW*,² p. 816)

On another occasion he said:

It seems it is not merely five or six of our people but more than half that are in sympathy with Hitler and want him to win.

P (*laughing*): Half?

2. Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 2001 edition in 2 volumes; abbreviated to *TW*.

Sri Aurobindo: No, it is not a matter to laugh at. It is a very serious matter. The Government can dissolve the Ashram at any moment. In Indo-China all religious bodies have been dissolved. And here the whole of Pondicherry is against us. They cannot do anything only because Governor Bonvin is friendly towards us. But even he, if he hears that people in the Ashram are pro-Hitler, will be compelled to take steps, at least to expel those who are so. If these people want the Ashram to be dissolved, they can come and tell me and I will dissolve it instead of the police doing it. They have no idea about the world, and talk like children. Hitlerism is the greatest menace that the world has ever met. If Hitler wins, do they think India has any chance of being free? It is a well-known fact that Hitler has an eye on India. He is openly talking of world-empire. He will turn towards the Balkans, crushing Italy on the way, which would be a matter of three weeks, then Turkey and then Asia Minor. Asia Minor ultimately means India. If there he meets Stalin, then it is only a question as to who wins and comes to India.

I hear K says that Russia can come now and conquer India. It is this kind of slave mentality that keeps India in bondage. He pretends to spirituality. Doesn't he know that the first thing that Stalin will do is to wipe out spirituality from India, apart from the fact that his own class will be crushed out? . . .

(17 May 1940, *TW*, pp. 641-42)

Nirod-da narrates:

A disciple wrote to the Mother, "The Congress is asking us not to contribute to the War Fund. What shall we do?" The answer given was: "Sri Aurobindo has contributed for a divine cause. If you help, you will be helping yourselves." Some were wishing for the victory of the Nazis because of their hatred for the British. The Mother had to give a stern admonition. She wrote: "It has become necessary to state emphatically and clearly that all who by their thoughts and wishes are supporting and calling for the victory of the Nazis are by that very fact collaborating with the Asura against the Divine and helping to bring about the victory of the Asura."

(*TY*, p. 127)

In a message on May 6, 1941, the Mother wrote:

The Asuric power that is acting with Hitler as instrument and seeking through him domination of the world is the same power that has been opposing Sri Aurobindo's work and trying to destroy it . . .

(*Mother India*, November 2008, p. 944)

The Mother also spoke to Nolini-da about the matter:

It is treachery against Sri Aurobindo to wish for Hitler's victory. Sri Aurobindo's cause is closely connected with that of the Allies and he is working night and day for it. It is because my nationality is French that the Ashram is allowed to exist. Otherwise it would have been dissolved long ago. There were many attempts to do so. If Hitler or Stalin wins, spirituality is doomed. Stalin will come to India and there will be no chance for freedom for a century.

(17 May 1940, *TW*, p. 642 fn)

Many politicians and even Ashramites questioned Sri Aurobindo's wisdom in supporting the British during the war. In *Savitri* some lines read:

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task;
 The world itself becomes his adversary,
 His enemies are the beings he came to save.
 Those he would save are his antagonists:
 This world is in love with its own ignorance,
 Its darkness turns away from the saviour light,
 It gives the cross in payment for the crown.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 29, p. 448)

On the question of supporting Britain, here is an extract from a letter of Sri Aurobindo:

It is a simple recognition of the fact that the victory of Great Britain in this war is not only to the interest of the whole of humanity including India, but necessary for the safeguarding of its future. If that is so, the obligation of at least a complete moral support follows as a necessary consequence.

It is objected that Britain has refused freedom to India and that therefore no Indian should support her in the War. The answer arises inevitably from the considerations stated above. The dominant need for India and the World is to survive the tremendous attack of Asuric Force which is now sweeping over the earth. The freedom of India, in whatever form, will be a consequence of that victory. The working towards freedom was clear already in the world and in the British Empire itself before the War; Eire, Egypt had gained their independence, Iraq had been granted hers; many free nationalities had arisen in Europe and Asia; India herself was drawing nearer to her goal and the attainment of it was coming to be recognised as inevitable. If the totalitarian new order extends over Asia, all that will disappear; the whole work done will be undone. . . . there is no moral incompatibility between India's claim to freedom and support to Britain in the struggle against Hitler, since it would be a support given for

the preservation of her own chance of complete liberty and the preservation also of three continents or even of the whole earth from a heavy yoke of servitude.

(CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 460-61)

The war years must have been an immense burden on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Yet Mother's love for her children was constant, unwavering, boundless and unfathomable. I mention two touching incidents during the war.

The Mother frequently had to interrupt her work and go into a trance. Nirod-da relates in his book that the Mother helped people even individually in her occult manner during the war. He quotes from the account of a sadhika:

Then the Mother explained, "During these years of the war, people used to call me in their great distress and I appeared to them at once, leaving everything behind."

"But Mother," I said, "people don't know you."

Looking at me she replied, "That doesn't matter. Whenever people call the Divine in any form, I answer to their call." (TY, p. 141)

Priti-di elaborates in her book *Moments Eternal*:

During the Second World War the Mother helped countless people come out of their difficulties and sorrows in countless ways. As soon as the inner call came from any of them She would go at once towards them however busy She might have been. She would come back to Her body only after She had lifted them out of their trouble. She used to go into a trance. Hours went by but the Mother would keep standing immobile. Sometimes holding a glass because She wanted to drink but She never did. For the call had come.

(p. 290)

The other incident is narrated by Udar in his book *Reminiscences*. At the beginning of the Second World War, when Sri Aurobindo gave Hitler a fifty-fifty chance of becoming the Ruler of the World, the Lord of Falsehood often came to the Mother to boast about all the troubles and defeats he was inflicting on the Allies. The Mother herself has said that she and the Asura often met and conversed with one another. "After all" she said, "I am his Mother" and "There is a very profound relation."

On the other hand Sri Aurobindo's single-mindedness and sacrifice in helping the Allied cause is reflected on the following conversation when he was asked by a disciple why he did not wish to cure his fractured leg with his yogic force.

M: Now I will ask a big question. People say that you can by your Power bring your injured leg to normal condition if you wish to do it.

Sri Aurobindo: I don't wish anything. If it is meant to come, it will.

N: But suppose you wanted it?

Sri Aurobindo: You mean if it is possible to do it? Quite possible.

N: Then why not do it.

Sri Aurobindo: It can't be done in a day. It requires much concentration for which I have no time.

M: But wouldn't it be profitable in the long run?

Sri Aurobindo: But I have other things to do.

(23 November 1939, *TW*, p. 253)

It was almost three months since the war had broken out and perhaps interrupted his work on transformation.

He who would save himself lives bare and calm;
 He who would save the race must share its pain:
 This he shall know who obeys that grandiose urge.
 The great who came to save this suffering world
 And rescue out of Time's shadow and the Law,
 Must pass beneath the yoke of grief and pain;
 They are caught by the Wheel that they had hoped to break,
 On their shoulders they must bear man's load of fate.

(*Savitri*, pp. 444-45)

...

But when God's messenger comes to help the world
 And lead the soul of earth to higher things,
 He too must carry the yoke he came to unloose;
 He too must bear the pang that he would heal:
 Exempt and unafflicted by earth's fate,
 How shall he cure the ills he never felt?
 He covers the world's agony with his calm;
 But though to the outward eye no sign appears
 And peace is given to our torn human hearts,
 The struggle is there and paid the unseen price;
 The fire, the strife, the wrestle are within.
 He carries the suffering world in his own breast;
 Its sins weigh on his thoughts, its grief is his:
 Earth's ancient load lies heavy on his soul;
 Night and its powers beleaguer his tardy steps,
 The titan adversary's clutch he bears;

His march is a battle and a pilgrimage.
 Life's evil smites, he is stricken with the world's pain:
 A million wounds gape in his secret heart.
 He journeys sleepless through an unending night;
 Antagonist forces crowd across his path;
 A siege, a combat is his inner life.
 Even worse may be the cost, direr the pain:
 His large identity and all-harbours love
 Shall bring the cosmic anguish into his depths,
 The sorrow of all living things shall come
 And knock at his doors and live within his house;
 A dreadful cord of sympathy can tie
 All suffering into his single grief and make
 All agony in all the worlds his own.
 He meets an ancient adversary Force,
 He is lashed with the whips that tear the world's worn heart;
 The weeping of the centuries visits his eyes:
 He wears the blood-glued fiery Centaur's shirt,
 The poison of the world has stained his throat.

...

Only by hard sacrifice is high heaven earned;
 He must face the fight, the pang who would conquer Hell.
 A dark concealed hostility is lodged
 In the human depths, in the hidden heart of Time
 That claims the right to change and mar God's work.
 A secret enmity ambushes the world's march;
 It leaves a mark on thought and speech and act:
 It stamps stain and defect on all things done;
 Till it is slain peace is forbidden on earth.

(*Savitri*, pp. 446-47)

The Mother told Maggi that she knew peace had been declared before she was told. Throughout the War she felt as though there was a great telephone exchange resting on her head, something reaching out to space. One day it simply was no longer there, she knew that it meant peace. (*TL*,³ p. 74)

About the New Years' prayers during the war the Mother said:

During the war it was wonderful, it was like a prophecy of what was going to come. (30 December 1953, *CWM*, Vol. 5, p. 417)

3. Maggi Lidchi-Grassi: *The Light that Shone into the Dark Abyss*, 1994; abbreviated to *TL*.

Finally, Germany was defeated in 1945 and in answer to a query Sri Aurobindo wrote:

This is no time for patting the Germans on the back or embracing and consoling them. If they are allowed to get on their legs again without trouble or without making an atonement for the horror of darkness and suffering they have inflicted on the world, they will rise only to repeat their performance — unless somebody else forestalls them. The only help we can give to Germany now is silence.

(19 March 1946, *SABCL* Vol. 26, p. 399)

I would like to express here a sense of wonder on how destiny played its hand. I am constantly reminded that my country's freedom was initiated and fought for by the revolutionaries. It was their sacrifice, courage and an intense vibrant love for their country, many inspired and guided by Sri Aurobindo's Will and Vision, that triggered and fired our independence. I feel like a freewheeling individual, without a care in the world, not bound by chains or scoffed at by the put-on air of superiority of a foreign invader. Grudgingly I do feel deeply grateful to Churchill, Bader, the RAF and the Allied forces for their courage and determination, in being worthy instruments in helping to restore the equation of the World Order, for I fear if it were not for their will and determination, what an oppressive world I would be living in. I hope we will stop for a moment and spare a thought for them.

The Second World War ended on 15 August 1945 when Japanese Emperor Hirohito broadcast a message declaring the unconditional surrender of his country. Later on 15 August 1947 we got our freedom from our foreign conquerors. It is conceivably the Divine's sacred seal and its tribute and salute to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that both these historic momentous days fall on his birthday, in remembrance for all that they have done for us and mankind. Mother's message on the Samadhi hopefully keeps humming in our ears ". . . before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee."

On 15th August 1945 Mother offered the following prayer:

The Victory has come, Thy Victory, O Lord, for which we render to Thee infinite thanks-giving.

But now our ardent prayer rises towards Thee. It is with Thy force and by Thy force that the victors have conquered. Grant that they do not forget it in their success and that they keep the promises which they have made to Thee in the hours of danger and anguish. They have taken Thy name to make war, may they not forget Thy grace when they have to make the peace.

(*CWM*, Vol. 15, p. 44)

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKAR

LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

(Continued from the issue of November 2010)

10. Poetry in Prose

FROM the day *The Life Divine* began appearing in the *Arya*, the work charmed the readers by its sheer power of language. Certainly it is known as Sri Aurobindo's magnificent metaphysical structure. But is it philosophy and no more? K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar has put it succinctly:

The Life Divine was, in fact, vision and experience rendered into inspired language, and without some rapport with such a world of intensities and radiances all cavalier attempts at mere 'understanding' must fail to come through. And yet, on closer scrutiny, even the massed paragraphs and seemingly endless sentences would be seen to be fully organised, with carefully wrought interior stitching and the needful soldering of the joints.¹

This is the reason why the book keeps attracting one's attention repeatedly. The philosophy has definitely an appeal. Aren't we charmed by the very idea of an evolutionary movement upwards which would also be a magnet to draw downwards an involution of the higher reaches of consciousness? Isn't it inspiring that the individual can be "the instrument and first field of the transformation"?² That this transformation is no idle imagination, since there has been an evolutionary transformation at so many levels since creation began? There is something poetic about the dialectics itself!

Scholarly students of philosophy have engaged themselves in detail ever since it began appearing in the *Arya* in 1914. Probably the first major international symposium on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy was held in 1957 by the Cultural Integration Fellowship, San Francisco as a result of the strivings of Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederic Spiegelberg. The proceedings of the symposium were published in the following year as *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*. Scholars from India and elsewhere made memorable presentations, taking various facets of the philosophical content of *The Life Divine* and compared Sri Aurobindo's ideas with other great philosophers. It was thrilling to read Raymond F. Piper describe it as "the most

1. *Sri Aurobindo: A biography and a history* (1985), p. 497.

2. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 997.

profound, comprehensive, and creative metaphysics in human history.”³ Ruth Reyna’s summation was unambiguous:

Sri Aurobindo’s theory of evolution as the Spirit’s progressive self-manifestation in infinitely variable conditions, offers a rational and integral expression of immediate contact with the Real by embodying a reconciliation of the reality of the world-process with the eternal perfection of the Spirit. In this light, the philosophy of integralism is seen as an art of life fashioned from the continuity of the creative process which integrates man with mankind, quickening each individual to a genuinely creative self-reliance while deepening and enhancing his communion with the universe.⁴

However, behind all the grave philosophy of evolution-involution flows quiet the perennial stream of poetry. Mere dialectics might interest us but can never enchant us. But poetic vision goes straight into reality and to the centre of truth. William Wordsworth has written several poems that draw our attention to the pulsations of life which can act upon us much better than the printed word which seeks to teach us on man and god. He seems to walk out of his *Collected Works* volume, twirling his walking stick as he commands us in his poem, ‘An Evening Scene on the Same Subject’:

Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;
Or surely you’ll grow double:
Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;
Why all this toil and trouble?

He would have us lay aside the book in hand and go out to hear the woodland linnet sing for “there’s more of wisdom in it.” Then come the unforgettable stanzas:

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things:—
We murder to dissect.

3. *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*, edited by Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederic Spiegelberg, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1960, p. 125.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

Those who have struggled with metaphysical concepts in Sanskrit trying to learn Indian philosophy know very well how difficult this attempt can be. Somewhere we have lost the ease of Sanskrit's flow and it has grown distant, bound up in the tomes of profound scholars. Sanskrit sounds grand and noble-accented, and it is, of course, a very precise, rich and scientific language. But generally it is no easy task to remain closeted with the books in Sanskrit on Indian philosophy. The various commentaries (the *Mahabhashya* of Adi Sankara, the *Sribhashya* of Ramanujacharya) need the regional language or English (for the likes of us) to draw close to them.

The Life Divine seems different. No fear grips me as I take it up, though I know fully well that I may never remember the sheer line of reasoning as it advances chapter after chapter. If I am going to lose the thread of the argument, still I will keep on reading the book. For, somehow I cannot think of the book as dry philosophy, a work that I must understand. Viewed from one angle, neither *The Life Divine* nor *Savitri* can be understood as a theorem of Euclid. Poetry is not understood, yet it goes within our consciousness and transforms us. Sri Aurobindo simply worked a twin wonder in creating epics. *The Life Divine* is philosophical poetry in prose; *Savitri* is philosophical poetry in poetry. We read both and are satisfied, leaving the mantric power of the Mahayogi to do the work of transformation, unknown to ourselves.

This feeling is nothing new for me. I have been a watcher of India's poetic skies, especially poetry in English written by Indians. Most of them have given up any association with prosody. Even the best collection released with much fanfare by a "reputed" publishing firm lacks poetic élan. You read the poems, spend a while thinking of the context or the poet and then forget the book. There is no urge in me to take them up for a second reading unless I need to teach them or write on contemporary trends. The Aurobindonian poets are somewhat different for they try to understand the firm base that is offered by prosodic structure.

But *The Life Divine* lures me. It cannot be because of the philosophy as I have already gained an idea of the outlines of this concept of Involution-Evolution. It happens that philosophy appeals only to the mind; ah, poetry moves the heart. In moments of joy or sorrow or self-pity, it is poetry that makes a special space for us and Sri Aurobindo's prose epic is indeed a magic carpet. Do we not turn back to the *Bhagavad Gita* in the same manner? Those outpourings of an overmental power as verses in this scripture? For instance, a truth seen everyday, but elevated to the status of high poetry: the "high world-pessimism and its spiritual release"⁵ that Sri Aurobindo finds in *Anityam asukham lokam imam prāpya bhajasva mām*. Writing on the subject in the *Arya* (1917-1920), he also mentioned the need for spreading the spaces of epic poetry with mantric distillations of man's experiences:

5. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 29.

The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are his greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future. His indeed may be the song of greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man and the universe.⁶

Sri Aurobindo himself sought to rectify this lacuna by taking up the writing of *Savitri*. But those days were still to come. Meanwhile, he had begun writing *The Life Divine*. The powers above the mental plane poured down a-plenty poetic intensities. Metaphysical concepts became splendid poetry. Such is the power of these sentences that recently going through a book on Vedanta I found the perfect first paragraph of *The Life Divine* presented with some negligible changes as the opening chord of a chapter, ‘The Summum Bonum of Human Life’:

The ultimate pre-occupation of Indian thought and aspiration — probably also the earliest pre-occupation — has been the quest after ‘freedom’ and ‘immortality’. The presence of the ephemeral and the mutable in the physical individuality of man in his terrestrial existence has always been the cause of an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction, grief and agony prompting him towards an everlasting search for perfection, freedom and immortality.⁷

I am not going to present here the first paragraph of *The Life Divine*. It is for the reader to reach out for his copy. It just shows how final Sri Aurobindo’s English is and one is so mesmerised and influenced by it that the words simply seep into our consciousness. I would not call it plagiarism. Do we not constantly use Shakespeare in our everyday conversation? When watching helplessly our temporal rulers in action, we simply echo *King Lear*: “A dog is obeyed in office.” Or abashed at a botched-up version of a good text one murmurs: “Bless thee, Bottom! Bless thee! Thou art translated!”

It is so with our contemporary writers on philosophy and metaphysics to echo Sri Aurobindo unconsciously or otherwise. Whether it is presenting the linkage between the eternal and the individual or the knowledge and the ignorance, nothing stops the winding poetic style as though the author is trying to reach out to the reader physically. I am reminded of Francis Thompson’s ‘The Hound of Heaven’. What was the use or purpose in going after other poetic works when this icon has always kept so close to me, sure that one day it will have gripped me as Thompson’s Hound of Heaven:

6. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

7. K. Narain, *The Doctrine of Bhakti in Vallabha Vedanta* (2009), p. 31.

Still with unhurrying chase
 And unperturbed pace
 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
 Came on the following Feet,
 And a Voice above their beat —
 ‘Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.’

Let us open *The Life Divine* at random. There is the six-syllabled title, ‘The Double Soul in Man’. There is poetic mystery in the line. We have always thought of one man, one soul. A ‘Double Soul’? The first quote of the bunch of epigraphs takes us to the image in Katha Upanishad: *anguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo madhyātmani tiṣṭhati*. The Purusha, the inner Self, no larger than the size of a man’s thumb. We would be meeting this image some decades later in *Savitri* as the “luminous Satyavan” moving beyond the human plane followed by Death. But a ‘Double Soul’? One must now needs read the entire chapter carefully as Sherlock Holmes followed the footprints of the Hound of the Baskervilles.

We learn of the unconscious drive that pushes forward evolution and the desire to possess what is won. Then comes the play of Love “which seeks both to possess and be possessed, to receive and to give itself” and then,

the fine flower of the fourth, its sign of perfection, we conceive as the pure and full emergence of the original will, the illumined fulfilment of the intermediate desire, the high and deep satisfaction of the conscious interchange of Love by the unification of the state of the possessor and possessed in the divine unity of souls which is the foundation of the supramental existence.⁸

A breathless sentence with a generous play of adjectives that moves with the gurgle of a mountain stream and not as a stern lesson in logic.

Unconscious drive, desire, Love, will. And Sri Aurobindo himself invites us to scrutinise the terms carefully to learn the evolution on the rise and how this evolution is essentially wrought with divine delight:

the ascent of Life is in its nature the ascent of the divine Delight in things from its dumb conception in Matter through vicissitudes and opposites to its luminous consummation in Spirit.⁹

“If our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts” certainly our happiest poems are those which deal with the Delight of Existence. Such is the

8. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 231.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

prose epic, *The Life Divine*. If man faces sorrow, has to deal with sad thoughts or death, he must needs get back to this fount of Delight which is hid from us by the mask of Sachchidananda. This is why we are always seeking; that is “the fundamental impulse and sense of Life.”¹⁰ Like the child seeking its mother who alone can give it the comfort and joy of life.

Then comes the question: What is this Delight? Ah, Sri Aurobindo does not keep us waiting: the soul! Nay we have in each of us two souls!

That term (Delight) is something in us which we sometimes call in a special sense the soul, — that is to say, the psychic principle which is not the life or the mind, much less the body, but which holds in itself the opening and flowering of the essence of all these to their own peculiar delight of self, to light, to love, to joy and beauty and to a refined purity of being. In fact, however, there is a double soul or psychic term in us, as every other cosmic principle in us is also double.¹¹

This is so with our entire make-up, says Sri Aurobindo. There is a surface mind and a subliminal mind, an outer life and subliminal force of life, a gross physical and a subtle body.

So too we have a double psychic entity in us, the surface desire-soul which works in our vital cravings, our emotions, aesthetic faculty and mental seeking for power, knowledge and happiness, and a subliminal psychic entity, a pure power of light, love, joy and refined essence of being which is our true soul behind the outer form of psychic existence we so often dignify by the name. It is when some reflection of this larger and purer psychic entity comes to the surface that we say of a man, he has a soul, and when it is absent in his outward psychic life that we say of him, he has no soul.¹²

It is a steady argument. How do I then think of it in terms of poetry? Well, all the philosophical books I have read seek to bring clarity by sheer argument. It could be Immanuel Kant or Adi Shankara and Ramanujacharya commenting upon the *Brahmasutras*. The line of reasoning is impeccable, couched in language that is not ambiguous. But they are statements. Sri Aurobindo also deals with statements. But the statements come with extensions that are not found in traditional philosophy which believes only in cold reason. With Sri Aurobindo arguments explaining concepts never come in isolation.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

For instance, the passage from *The Future Poetry* quoted earlier is a lively dance of superlatives. “Greatest possible”, “greatest flight”, “highest pinnacle”, “largest field of vision”. In the same manner, it is not enough for Sri Aurobindo to say that there is a subliminal psychic entity within us which is the deeper soul. It must have a string of adjectives, light, love, joy. With the infusion of this poetic style, *The Life Divine* ceases to be a philosophical tract. Here is a teacher who does not state the lesson and turn away. He engages us in a constant state of mental alertness. Before the idea of a “subliminal psychic entity” has sunk into our consciousness, Sri Aurobindo hastens to say that the word ‘subliminal’ is actually misleading! There is a shower of poetic imagery to catch our attention:

. . . for this presence is not situated below the threshold of waking mind, but rather burns in the temple of the inmost heart behind the thick screen of an ignorant mind, life and body, not subliminal but behind the veil, — this veiled psychic entity is the flame of the Godhead always alight within us, inextinguishable even by that dense unconsciousness of any spiritual self within which obscures our outward nature. It is a flame born out of the Divine and, luminous inhabitant of the Ignorance, grows in it till it is able to turn it towards the Knowledge.¹³

It is unfortunate that many of us remain within the damp coziness of “the thick screen of an ignorant mind” and speak as if we know everything, be it the highest flights of philosophy or the life of Sri Aurobindo. Here was a born teacher with poesy at his fingertips. Poetry was also part of his outer life. It was the poetic spirit in a hero which made him see the living deity in the stone goddess, drew him to sacrifice everything at the altar of Mother India, and gave him the vision of a physical chunk of geographical area as a Bhavani Bharati. This is the reason why his life, his philosophy, politics and his sociology appeal to our deeper (subliminal, of course) self. Which serious philosopher would use a smiling, self-deprecatory tone in a metaphysical treatise by writing, “the outer form of psychic existence we so often dignify by the name”. “We so often dignify by the name”!

At the same time, he appeals to the poetic spirit in us that this is no negligible matter. This subliminal soul is that which endures, it is “an indestructible spark of the Divine”! We must also remember here that it is not the imagery alone that gives the work the elegant movement of poetry. There is a rhythm, a balance of phrases and a visionary aura which proclaims that this is not a mere work of prose. Why not spend a minute with the concluding paragraph of ‘The Double Soul in Man’? Here is a sublime peroration swaying the multitude to take a positive view of earthly existence, with key terms like Supermind, Light, Force and Ananda falling in their allotted slots of rhythmic movement:

13. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

In Supermind is the integrating Light,
 the consummating Force,
 the wide entry into the supreme Ananda:
 the psychic being uplifted by that Light and Force
 can unite itself with the original Delight of existence
 from which it came:
 overcoming the dualities of pain and pleasure,
 delivering from all fear and shrinking
 the mind, life and body,
 it can recast the contacts of existence
 in the world into terms
 of the Divine Ananda.¹⁴

How can this be a prosaic treatise? The eminent English critic D. L. Murray had found “beauty of tone” and “beauty of inspiration” in the work. Both are sure marks of poetry. It also explains why the common reader does not feel distanced from it by the tag of metaphysics. The interrogator who finds us reading might ask us: “What is the use of reading the book if you do not *understand* it?”

I have an answer for that. No less a person than Amrita who had gone to Sri Aurobindo even in those early days in Pondicherry is my inspiration for revering *The Life Divine* as an icon and reading it for the sheer Ananda it gives me. Amrita was once reading aloud a chapter of the book as it was being serialised in the *Arya*. Sri Aurobindo happened to come that side and stood listening silently. When Amrita realised the Master’s presence, he was abashed. Immediately he was reassured by the gentle voice: “It is not necessary to understand it all at once. Go on reading. If you find a joy in reading, you need not stop it.” Amrita spent a long lifetime reading the book. Shall we do less?

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

14. *Ibid.*, p. 244.