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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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O YE POWERS

O ye Powers of the Supreme and of the Mother, the Divine,
I have come to you initiate, a bearer of the sign.
For I carry the Name in me that nothing can efface.
I have breathed in an illimitable spiritual Space
And my soul through the unfathomable stillnesses has heard
The god-voices of knowledge and the marvels of the Word.
It has listened to the secret that was hidden in the night
Of the inconscient infinities first when by His might
He arose out of the caverns of the darkness self-enwrapped
And the nebulae were churned up like to foam-froth and were shaped
Till these millions of universes mystical upbuoyed
Were outsprinkled as if stardust on the Dragon of the Void.
I was there then in the infinitesimal and obscure
As a seed soul in the fire seeds of the energies that endure.
I have learned now to what purpose I have loitered as His spark
In the midnight of earth Matter like a glow-worm in the dark
And my spirit was imprisoned in the muteness of a stone,
A soul thoughtless and left voiceless and impuissant and alone.

SRI AUROBINDO

[‘Incomplete Poems from Manuscripts, c. 1927 – 1947’

No title in the manuscript. Circa 1936. Three handwritten manuscripts. In the final manuscript, the last line ends in a comma, indicating that the piece is incomplete. — Ed. Note in CWSA]

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 676)

THE BOURGEOIS AND THE SAMURAI

Two oriental nations have come powerfully under the influence of Western ideas and felt the impact of European civilization during the nineteenth century, India and Japan. The results have been very different. The smaller nation has become one of the mightiest Powers in the modern world, the larger in spite of far greater potential strength, a more original culture, a more ancient and splendid past and a far higher mission in the world, remains a weak, distracted, subject & famine-stricken people politically, economically, morally & intellectually dependent on the foreigner and unable to realise its great possibilities. It is commonly said that this is because Japan has assimilated Western Science and organization and even in many respects excelled its teachers; India has failed in this all-important task of assimilation. If we go a step farther back and insist on asking why this is so, we shall be told it is because Japan has “reformed” herself and got rid of ideas & institutions unsuited to modern times; while India clings obstinately to so much that is outworn and effete. Even if we waive aside the question whether the old Indian ideals are unfit to survive or whether all our institutions are really bad in themselves or unadaptable to modern conditions, still the explanation itself has to be explained. Why has Japan so admirably transformed herself? why has the attempt at transformation in India been a failure? The solution of problems of this kind has to be sought not in abstractions, not in machinery, but in men. It is the spirit in man which moulds his fate; it is the spirit of a nation which determines its history

Describe the type of human character which prevails in a nation during a given period of its life under given conditions, and it is possible to predict in outline what the general history of the nation must be during that period. In Japan the dominant Japanese type had been moulded by the shaping processes of an admirable culture and when the Western impact came, Japan remained faithful to her ancient spirit; she merely took over certain forms of European social & political organization necessary to complete her culture under modern conditions and poured into these forms the old potent dynamic spirit of Japan, the spirit of the Samurai. It is the Samurai type which has been dominant in that country during the nineteenth century. In India the mass of the nation has remained dormant; European culture has had upon it a powerful disintegrating and destructive influence, but has been powerless to reconstruct or revivify. But in the upper strata a new type has been evolved to serve the necessities and interests of the foreign rulers, a type which is not Indian, but foreign — and in almost all our social, political, educational, literary & religious activities the spirit of this new & foreign graft has predominated & determined the extent & quality of our progress. This type is the bourgeois. In India, the bourgeois,

in Japan, the Samurai; in this single difference is comprised the whole contrasted histories of the two nations during the nineteenth century.

What is the bourgeois? For the word is unknown in India, though the thing is so prominent. The bourgeois is the average contented middle class citizen who is in all countries much the same in his fundamental character & habits of thought, in spite of pronounced racial differences in temperament & self-expression. He is a man of facile sentiments and skin-deep personality; generally “enlightened” but not inconveniently illuminated. In love with his life, his ease and above all things his comforts, he prescribes the secure maintenance of these precious possessions as the first indispensable condition of all action in politics and society; whatever tends to disturb or destroy them, he condemns as foolish, harebrained, dangerous or fanatical, according to the degree of its intensity and is ready to repress by any means in his power. In the conduct of public movements he has an exaggerated worship for external order, moderation and decorum and hates over-earnestness and over-strenuousness. Not that he objects to plenty of mild & innocuous excitement; but it must be innocuous and calculated not to have a disturbing effect on the things he most cherishes. He has ideals and likes to talk of justice, liberty, reform, enlightenment and all similar abstractions; he likes too to see them reigning and progressing around him decorously and with their proper limitations. He wishes to have them maintained, if they already exist, but in moderation and with moderation; if they do not exist, the craving for them should be, in his opinion, a lively but still well-regulated fire, not permitted to interfere with the safety, comfort and decorum of life, — the means adopted towards acquiring them should be also moderate and decorous and as far as may be safe and comfortable. An occasional sacrifice of money, leisure and other precious things for their sake, he is always ready to meet; he has a keen zest for the reputation such sacrifices bring him and still more for the comfortable sense of personal righteousness which they foster. The bourgeois is the man of good sense and enlightenment, the man of moderation, the man of peace and orderliness, the man in every way “respectable”, who is the mainstay of all well-ordered societies. As a private man he is respectable; that is to say, his character is generally good, and when his character is not, his reputation is; he is all decorous in his virtues, decent in the indulgence of his vices or at least in their concealment, often absolutely honest, almost always as honest as an enlightened self-interest will permit. His purse is well filled or at any rate not indecently empty; he is a good earner, a conscientious worker, a thoroughly safe & reliable citizen.¹ But this admirable creature has his defects and limitations. For great adventures, tremendous enterprises, lofty

1. *The following sentence was written in the top margin of the manuscript. Its place of insertion was not marked, but it presumably was meant to be inserted here:*

Of course there are exceptions, instances of successful & respected blackguardism, but these are the small minority.

achievements, the storm and stress of mighty & eventful periods in national activity, he is unfit. These things are for the heroes, the martyrs, the criminals, the enthusiasts, the degenerates, geniuses, the men of exaggerated virtue, exaggerated ability, exaggerated ideas. He enjoys the fruit of their work when it is done, but while it is doing, he opposes and hinders more often than helps. For he looks on great ideals as dreams and on vehement enthusiasms as harebrained folly; he distrusts everything new & disturbing, everything that has not been done before or is not sanctioned by success & the accomplished fact; revolt is to him a madness & revolution a nightmare. Fiery self-annihilating enthusiasm, noble fanaticism, relentless & heroic pursuit of an object, the original brain that brings what is distant & ungrasped into the boundaries of reality, the dynamic Will and genius which makes the impossible possible; these things he understands as matters of history and honours them in the famous dead or in those who have succeeded; but in living & yet striving men they inspire him with distrust and repulsion. He will tell you that these things are not to be found in the present generation; but if confronted with the living originator, he will condemn him as a learned idiot; face to face with the living hero, he will decry him as a dangerous madman, — unless & until he sees on the head of either the crown of success & assured reputation.

He values also the things of the mind in a leisurely comfortable way as adorning and setting off his enlightened ease and competence. A little art, a little poetry, a little religion, a little scholarship, a little philosophy, all these are excellent ingredients in life, and give an air of decorous refinement to his surroundings. They must not be carried too far or interfere with the great object of life which is to earn money, clothe and feed one's family, educate one's sons to the high pitch of the B.A. degree or the respectable eminence of the M.A., marry one's daughters decently, rank high in service or the professions, stand well in the eye of general opinion and live & die decorously, creditably and respectably. Anything disturbing to these high duties, anything exaggerated, intense, unusual is not palatable to the bourgeois. He shrugs his shoulders over it and brushes it aside with the one word, "mad", or eccentric.²

(Such is the bourgeois and it was the bourgeois of the mildest & most inefficient type who reigned in India in the nineteenth century. It was the bourgeois which University education tended, perhaps sought to evolve; it was the bourgeois which the political social conditions moulded and brought to the front. In India the bourgeois; in Japan the Samurai, that one enormous difference explains the difference in the histories of the two countries during the second half of the last century.)³

2. The following sentence was written in the top margin of the manuscript. Its place of insertion was not marked:

Such a type may give stability to a society; it cannot reform or revolutionize it. Such a type may make the politics of a nation safe, decorous and reputable. It cannot make that nation great or free.

3. Sri Aurobindo placed parenthesis marks on both sides of this paragraph after writing it. He seems to have intended to move it elsewhere. — Ed.

It is undoubtedly this type which has dominated us in the nineteenth century. Of course the really great names, those that will live in history as creators & originators are men who went beyond this type; either they belonged to, but exceeded it or they departed from it. But the average, the determining type was the bourgeois. In Senate & Syndicate, in Legislative Council & District Board or Municipal Corporation, in Congress & Conference, in the services & professions, even in literature & scholarship, even in religion he was everywhere with his well-regulated mind, his unambitious ideals, his snug little corner of culture, his "education" and "enlightenment", his comfortable patriotism, his comfortable enlightenment, his easy solution of the old problem how to serve both God & Mammon, yet offend neither, his self-satisfaction, his decorous honesty, his smug respectability. Society was made after his model, politics moulded in his image, education confined within his limits, literature & religion stamped with the seal of the bourgeois.

The bourgeois as a distinct & well-evolved entity is an entirely modern product in India, he is the creation of British policy, English education, Western civilization. Ancient India, mediaeval India were not a favourable soil for his growth. The spirit of ancient India was aristocratic; its thought & life moulded in the cast of a high & proud nobility, an extreme & lofty strenuousness. The very best in thought, the very best in action, the very best in character, the very best in literature & art, the very best in religion and all the world well lost if only this very best might be attained, such was the spirit of ancient India. The Brahmin who devoted himself to poverty & crushed down every desire in the wholehearted pursuit of knowledge & religious self-discipline; the Kshatriya who, hurling his life joyously into the shock of chivalrous battle, held life, wife, children, possessions, ease, happiness as mere dust in the balance compared with honour & the Kshatriya dharma, the preservation of self-respect, the protection of the weak, the noble fulfilment of princely duty; the Vaishya, who toiling all his life to amass riches, poured them out as soon as amassed in self-forgetting philanthropy holding himself the mere steward & not the possessor of his wealth; the Shudra who gave himself up loyally to humble service, faithfully devoting his life to his dharma, however low, in preference to self-advancement & ambition; these were the social ideals of the age.

The imagination of the Indian tended as has been well said to the grand & enormous in thought and morals. The great formative images of legend & literature to the likeness with which his childhood was encouraged to develop & which his manhood most cherished were of an extreme & lofty type. He saw Harischundra give up all that life held precious & dear rather than that his lips should utter a lie or his plighted word be broken. He saw Prahlada buried under mountains, whelmed in the seas, tortured by the poison of a thousand venomous serpents, yet calmly true to his faith. He saw Buddha give up his royal state, wealth, luxury, wife, child & parents so that mankind might be saved. He saw Shivi hew the flesh from his own limbs to save one small dove from the pursuing falcon; Karna tear his own body

with a smile for the joy of making a gift; Duryodhan refuse to yield one inch of earth without noble resistance & warlike struggle. He saw Sita face exile, hardship, privation & danger in the eagerness of wifely love & duty, Savitri rescue by her devotion her husband back from the visible grip of death. These were the classical Indian types. These were the ideals into the mould of which the minds of men & women were trained to grow. The sense-conquering thought of the philosopher, the magnificent achievements of the hero, the stupendous renunciations of the Sannyasin, [the] unbounded liberality of the man of wealth, everything was exaggeration, extreme, filled with an epic inspiration, a world-defying enthusiasm. The bourgeois though he existed in the rough of course, as in all civilized societies he must exist, had no real chance of evolution; on such a height with so rare an atmosphere, he could not grow; where such tempests of self-devotion blew habitually, his warm comfortable personality could not expand.

The conditions of mediaeval India suited him little better, — the continual clash of arms, the unceasing stir & splendour & strenuousness of life, the fierceness of the struggle and the magnificence of the achievement, the ceaseless tearing down & building up which resulted from Mahomedan irruption and the action & reaction of foreign & indigenous forces, formed surroundings too restless & too flamboyant. Life under the Moguls was splendid, rich & luxurious, but it was not safe & comfortable. Magnificent possibilities were open to all men whatever their birth or station but magnificent abilities and an unshaken nerve & courage were needed to grasp them or to keep what had been grasped. There was no demand for the stable & easy virtues of the bourgeois. In the times of stress and anarchy which accompanied the disintegration of mediaeval India, the conditions were yet more unfavourable; character and morals shared in the general disintegration, but ability & courage were even more in demand than before and for the bourgeois there was no place vacant. (The men who figured in the revolutions in Bengal, the Deccan, the Punjab & the North were often, like their European allies & antagonists, men of evil character, self-seeking, unscrupulous & Machiavellian, but they were at least men.) It was not till mediaeval India breathed its last in the convulsions of 1857 that entirely new conditions reigned and an entirely new culture prevailed with an undisputed sway wholly favourable to the rapid development of the bourgeois type and wholly discouraging to the development of any other.

This emergence and domination of the bourgeois was a rapid transformation, not unparalleled in history, for something of the same kind seems to have happened in the provinces of the Roman Empire under the Caesars, but astonishing in a people whose past history & temperament had been so supremely unPhilistine. That a society which had only a few decades ago prostrated itself before the naked ascetic and the penniless Brahmin, should now wear the monied man and the official as the tilak on its forehead, was indeed a marvellous revolution. But given the new conditions, nothing else could have happened. British rule necessitated the growth of the

bourgeois, British policy fostered it, and the plant grew so swiftly because a forcing-house had been created for his rapid cultivation and the soil was kept suitably shallow and the air made warm and humid for his needs. It was as in the ancient world when the nations accepted peace, civilisation and a common language at the cost of national decay, the death of their manhood and final extinction or age-long slavery. The Pax Britannica was his parent and an easy servitude nursed him into maturity.

For the first need of the bourgeois is a guaranteed and perfect security for his person, property and pursuits. Peace, comfort and safety are the very breath of his nostrils. But he gravitates to a peace for whose preservation he is not called on to wear armour and wield the sword, a comfort he has not to purchase by the discomfort of standing sentinel over his liberties, or a safety his own alertness and courage must protect from the resurgence of old dangers. The bourgeois in arms is not the true animal; the purity of his breed is sullied by something of the virtues and defects of the soldier. He must enjoy the fruits of peace and security he has not earned, without responsibility for their maintenance or fear of their loss. Such conditions he found in almost unparalleled perfection in British India. He was asked to stand as the head of a disarmed and dependent society, secured from external disturbance & tied down to a rigid internal tranquillity by the deprivation of all functions except those of breadwinner and taxpayer and to vouch himself to the world by a respectable but not remarkable education and achievement as the visible proof of England's civilising mission in India. Such conditions were to the bourgeois as the moisture & warmth of the hothouse to the orchid. He grew in them, rank & luxurious.

Then again, for his perfection and dominance, the society he lives in must honour his peculiar qualities above all others and the substantial rewards and covetable distinctions of life [be] reserved for them chiefly or for them alone. The British rule gave him this honour, showered on him these rewards & distinctions, and Indian society, more & more moulded by British ideas, followed as a society almost inevitably follows the lead of the rulers. Under the new dispensation of Providence there was no call for the high qualities of old, the Aryan or noble virtues which, whatever else failed or perished, had persisted in Indian character for thousands of years, since first the chariots rolled on the hither side of the Indus. What need for the Rajpoot's courage, the robust manhood, the noble pride of the Kshatriya, when heroic and unselfish England claimed the right of shedding her blood for the safety of the land? What room for the gifts of large initiative, comprehensive foresight, wise aspiration which make the statesman, when a Bentinck or a Mayo, a Dufferin or a Curzon were ready & eager to take & keep the heavy burdens of Government out of the hands of the children of the soil? The princely spirit, the eagle's vision, the lion's heart, these were things that might be buried away with the memories of the great Indian rulers of the past. Happy India, civilised and cared for by human seraphs from over the sea, had no farther need for them. So from sheer inanition, from want of light, room and air, the Kshatriya died out of the

soil which had first produced him and the bourgeois took his place. But if room was none for the soldier & the statesman, little could be found for the Brahmin, the sage or the Sannyasin. British rule had no need for scholars, it wanted clerks; British policy welcomed the pedant but feared, even when it honoured, the thinker, for the strong mind might pierce through shows to the truth and the deep thought teach the people to embrace great ideals and live and die for them; British education flung contempt on the Sannyasin as an idler and charlatan, and pointed with admiration to the strenuous seeker for worldly goods and success as the finest work of the creator. So Vyasa & Valmekie were forgotten for weavers of idle tales and Smiles and Sir Arthur Helps took their place as an instructor of youth, the gospel of Philistinism in its naked crudeness was beaten into the minds of our children when most malleable. Thus Ramdas was following Shivaji into the limbo of the unreturning past. And if God had not meant otherwise for our nation, the Sannyasin would have become an extinct type, Yoga been classed among dead superstitions with witchcraft & alchemy and Vedanta sent the way of Pythagoras & Plato. Nor was the old Vaishya type needed by the new dispensation. The Indian mechanic, engineer, architect, artist, craftsman got notice of dismissal; for to develop the industrial life of the country was no part of England's business in India. As she had taken the functions of government and war into her own hands, so she would take that of production. Whatever India needed, beneficent England with her generous system of free trade would supply and the Indian might sit at ease under his palm tree or, gladly singing, till his fields, rejoicing that Heaven had sent him a ruling nation so greedy to do him good. What was wanted was not Indian artisans or Indian captains of industry, but plenty of small shopkeepers and big middlemen to help conquer & keep India as a milch cow for British trade & British capital.

Thus all the great types which are nurtured on war, politics, thought, spirituality, activity & enterprise, the outgrowths of a vigorous and healthy national existence, the high fruits of humanity who are the very energy of life to a community, were discouraged and tended to disappear and in their place there was an enormous demand for the bourgeois qualities. The safe, respectable man, satisfied with ease and not ambitions of command, content with contemporary repute and not hankering after immortality, the superficial man who unable to think profoundly could yet pose among his peers as intellectual, who getting no true culture, wore a specious appearance of education, who guiltless of a single true sacrifice for his country, yet bulked large as a patriot, found an undisputed field open to him. The rewards of life now depended on certain outward signs of merit which were purely conventional. An University degree, knowledge of English, possession of a post in Government service or a professional diploma, a Government title, European clothes or a sleek dress and appearance, a big house full of English furniture, these were the badges by which Society recognized its chosen. These signs were all purely conventional. The degree did not necessarily denote a good education nor the knowledge of English

a wide culture or successful living into new ideas, nor the Government post administrative capacity, nor the diploma special fitness for the profession, nor the title any merit in the holder, nor the big house or fine dress a mastery of the art of social life, nor the English clothes, European grit, science and enterprise. They were merely counters borrowed from Europe, but universally taken, as they are not usually taken in Europe or any living nation, as a sufficient substitute for the reality. Wealth, success, and certain outward signs of a facile respectability had become to our new civilised & refined society the supreme tests of the man.

All these were conditions unusually favourable to a rank luxuriance of the bourgeois type, which thrives upon superficiality and lives by convention. The soil was suitably shallow, the atmosphere sufficiently warm & humid. The circumstances of our national life & the unique character of our education hastened & perfected the growth. Both were characterized by the false appearance of breadth covering an almost miraculous superficiality. Our old Indian life was secluded, but lofty & intense, like a pine-tree on the mountain-tops, like a tropical island in unvisited seas; our new life parted with the loftiness & intensity when it lost the isolation, but it boasted in vain of an added breadth, for it was really more provincial & narrow than the old, which had at least given room for the development of all our human faculties. The news of the world's life poured in on us through the foreign telegrams & papers, we read English books, we talked about economics and politics, science & history, enlightenment & education, Rousseau, Mill, Bentham, Burke, and used the language of a life that was not ours, in the vain belief that so we became cosmopolitans and men of enlightenment. Yet all the time India was as much & more outside the great life of the world than it was in the days of Mahomad Tughlak or Bahadur Shah. The number of men in educated India who had any vital conception or any real understanding & mastery of the great currents of life, thought & motive which sway the vast world outside, was always wonderfully small. It could not be otherwise; for the life of that world was not our life, nor was our life any part of the world's, any more than the days of a prisoner in a gaol or reformatory are part of the free activity of society. The thunder of great wars, the grand collision and struggle of world-moving ideas and mighty interests, the swift & strong currents of scientific discovery and discussion, the intellectual change & stir, the huge & feverish pulsation of commercial competition from China to Peru, all this was to us as the scenes in the street to a man watching from his prison bars. We might take a deep & excited interest, we might almost persuade ourselves by the vividness of our interest that we were part of the scene, but if a voice within cried to us, "Out, out, you too into the battle & the struggle and the joy & stir of this great world's life," the cold iron of the window-bars and the hard stone of the prison walls stood between. The jailer might not jingle his keys obtrusively nor the warder flourish his baton, but we knew well they were there. And we really believed in the bland promise that if we conducted ourselves well, we should some day get tickets of leave. We read & thought but did

not live what we read & thought. So our existence grew ever more artificial and unreal. The fighter and the thinker in us dwindled & the bourgeois flourished and grew.

Contentment with an artificial existence, the habit of playing with counters as if they were true coin of life, made the old rich flood of vitality, strong character, noble aspiration, excellent achievement run ever shallower & thinner in our veins. So we accepted and made the best of an ignoble ease.

Our education too had just the same pride in a false show of breadth and the same confined and narrow scope. In our schools & colleges we were set to remember many things, but learned nothing. We had no real mastery of English literature, though we read Milton & Burke and quoted Byron & Shelley, nor of history though we talked about Magna Charta & Runnymede, nor of philosophy though we could mispronounce the names of most of the German philosophers, nor science though we used its name daily, nor even of our own thought & civilisation though its discussion filled columns of our periodicals. We knew little & knew it badly. And even we could not profit by the little we knew for advance, for origination; even those who struggled to a wider knowledge proved barren soil. The springs of originality were fast growing atrophied by our unnatural existence. The great men among us who strove to originate were the spiritual children of an older time who still drew sap from the roots of our ancient culture and had the energy of the Mogul times in their blood. But their success was not commensurate with their genius & with each generation these grew rarer & rarer. The sap soon began to run dry, the energy to dwindle away. Worse than the narrowness & inefficiency, was the unreality of our culture. Our brains were as full of liberty as our lives were empty of it. We read and talked so much of political rights that we never so much as realized that we had none to call our own. The very sights & sounds, the description of which formed the staple of our daily reading, were such as most of us would at no time see or hear. We learned science without observation of the objects of science, words & not the things which they symbolised, literature by rote, philosophy as a lesson to be got by heart, not as a guide to truth or a light shed on existence. We read of and believed in English economy, while we lived under Indian conditions, and worshipped the free trade which was starving us to death as a nation. We professed notions of equality, and separated ourselves from the people, of democracy, and were the servants of absolutism. We pattered off speeches & essays about social reform, yet had no idea of the nature of a society. We looked to sources of strength and inspiration we could not reach and left those untapped which were ours by possession and inheritance. We knew so little of life that we expected others who lived on our service to prepare our freedom, so little of history that we thought reform could precede liberty, so little of science that we believed an organism could be reshaped from outside. We were ruled by shopkeepers and consented enthusiastically to think of them as angels. We affected virtues we were given no opportunity of assimilating and lost those our

fathers had handed down to us. All this in perfect good faith, in the full belief that we were Europeanising ourselves, and moving rapidly toward political, social, economical, moral, intellectual progress. The consummation of our political progress was a Congress which yearly passed resolutions it had no power to put in practice, statesmen whose highest function was to ask questions which need not even be answered, councillors who would have been surprised if they had been consulted, politicians who did not even know that a Right never lives until it has a Might to support it. Socially we have initiated a feeble attempt to revivify the very basis of our society by a few petty mechanical changes instead of a spiritual renovation which could alone be equal to so high a task; economically, we attained great success in destroying our industries and enslaving ourselves to the British trader; morally, we successfully compassed the disintegration of the old moral ideas & habits and substituted for them a superficial respectability; intellectually, we prided ourselves [on] the tricking out of our minds in a few leavings, scraps and strays of European thought at the sacrifice of an immense and eternal heritage. Never was an education more remote from all that education truly denotes; instead of giving the keys to the vast mass of modern knowledge, or creating rich soil for the qualities that conquer circumstance & survive, they made the mind swallow a heterogeneous jumble of mainly useless information; trained a tame parrot to live in a cage & talk of the joys of the forest. British rule, Britain's civilizing mission in India has been the record success in history in the hypnosis of a nation. It persuaded us to live in a death of the will & its activities, taking a series of hallucinations for real things and creating in ourselves the condition of morbid weakness the hypnotist desired, until the Master of a mightier hypnosis laid His finger on India's eyes and cried "Awake." Then only the spell was broken, the slumbering mind realised itself and the dead soul lived again.

But the education which was poison to all true elements of national strength and greatness, was meat & drink to the bourgeois. The bourgeois delights in convention, because truth is too hard a taskmaster and makes too severe a demand on character, energy & intellect. He craves superficiality, a shallow soil to grow in. For to attain depth requires time & energy which would have to be unprofitably diverted from his chief business of making his individual way in the world. He cannot give up his life to his country, but if she will be grateful for a few of his leisure hours, he will give in those limits ungrudging service & preen himself on his public virtues. Prodigious charity would be uncomfortable & unwise, but if he can earn applause by parting with a fraction of his superfluities, he is always ready for the sacrifice. Deep scholarship would unfit him for his part in life, but if figuring in learned societies or writing a few articles and essays, an occasional book guiltless of uncomfortable originality, or a learned compilation prepared under his superintendence and issued in his name will make him a man of letters, he will court & prize that easily-earned reputation. The effort to remould society and rebuild the nation is

too huge and perilous a task for a comfortable citizen, but he is quite prepared to condemn old & inconvenient institutions & superstitions and lend his hand to a few changes which will make social life more pleasant and comfortable. Superficiality, unreality of thought & deed thus became the stamp of all our activities.

Those who say that the new spirit in India which, before nascent & concealed, started to conscious life in the Swadeshi agitation and has taken Swadeshi, Swaraj and Self-help as its motto, is nothing new but a natural development of the old, are minds blinded by the habits of thought of the past century. The new Nationalism is the very antithesis, the complete and vehement negation of the old. The old movement sought to make a wider circle of activity, freer living-room and a more comfortable and eminent position for the bourgeois, to prolong the unnatural & evil conditions of which the subject nations died under the civilizing rule of Rome and which British rule has recreated for India; the new seeks to replace the bourgeois by the Samurai and to shatter the prison house which the nineteenth century made for our mother and build anew a palace for her glory, a garden for her pleasure, a free domain for her freedom & her pride. The old looked only to the power & interests of the educated, enlightened middle class, and shrank from the ignorant, the uneducated, the livers in the past, the outer unilluminated barbarian, drawing aside the hem of its robes lest it should touch impurity. The new overleaps every barrier; it calls to the clerk at his counter, the trader in his shop, the peasant at his plough; it summons the Brahmin from his temple and takes the hand [of] the Chandala in his degradation; it seeks out the student in his College, the schoolboy at his books, it touches the very child in its mother's arms & the secluded zenana has thrilled to its voice; its eye searches the jungle for the Santal and travels the hills for the wild tribes of the mountains. It cares nothing for age or sex or caste or wealth or education or respectability; it mocks at the talk of a stake in the country; it spurns aside the demand for a property qualification or a certificate of literacy. It speaks to the illiterate or the man in the street in such rude vigorous language as he best understands, to youth & the enthusiast in accents of poetry, in language of fire, to the thinker in the terms of philosophy and logic, to the Hindu it repeats the name of Kali, to the Mahomedan it spurs to action for the glory of Islam. It cries to all to come forth, to help in God's work & remake a nation, each with what his creed or his culture, his strength, his manhood or his genius can give to the new nationality. The only qualification it asks for is a body made in the womb of an Indian mother, a heart that can feel for India, a brain that can think and plan for her greatness, a tongue that can adore her name or hands that can fight in her quarrel. The old shunned sacrifice & suffering, the new rushes to embrace it. The old gave a wide berth to the jail and the rods & scourges of Power; the new walks straight to meet them. The old shuddered at the idea of revolution; the new is ready to set the whole country in turmoil for the sake of an idea. The old bent the knee to Caesar and presented him a list of grievances; the new leaves his presence or dragged back to it, stands erect and defies him in the

midst of his legions.

The initial condition of recovering our liberty meant a peril and a gigantic struggle from the very possibility of which we averted our eyes in a panic of bourgeois terror. It was safer & easier to cheat ourselves into believing in a contradiction and living a lie. Yet nothing could be more fatal, more insidiously destructive to the roots of manhood. It is far better to fall and bleed for ever in a hopeless but unremitting struggle than to drink of that draught of death and lethe. A people true to itself, a race that hopes to live, will not comfort itself and sap its manhood by the opiate of empty formulas and specious falsehoods; it will prefer eternal suffering & disaster. For in truth, as our old thinkers used always to insist, the whole universe stands; truth is the root and condition of life and to believe a lie, to live in a lie, is to deliver oneself to disease and death. The belief that a subject nation can acquiesce in subjection and yet make true & vital progress, growing to strength in its chains, is a lie. The idea that mitigations of subjection constitute freedom or prepare a race for freedom or that anything but the exercise of liberty fits man for liberty, is another lie. The teaching that peace and security are more important and vital to man than liberty is a third lie. Yet all these lies and many others we believed in, hugged to our hearts and made the law of our thoughts throughout the nineteenth century. The result was stagnation, or a progress in weakness and disintegration.

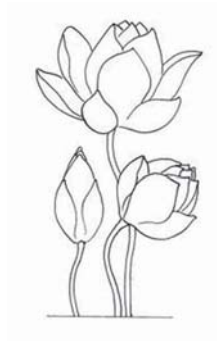
The doctrine that social & commercial progress must precede or will of themselves bring about political strength & liberty, is a fourth & very dangerous lie; for a nation is no aggregate of separable functions, but a harmony of functions, of which government and political arrangement is the oldest, most central and most vital and determines the others.

Our only hope of resurgence was in some such great unsealing of the eyes to the Maya in which we existed and the discovery of some effective mantra, some strong spiritual impulse which should have the power to renovate us from within. For good or for evil the middle class now leads in India, and whatever saving impulse comes to the nation, must come from the middle class, whatever upward movement begins, it must initiate and lead. But for that to happen the middle class must by a miracle be transfigured and lifted above itself; the natural breeding ground of the bourgeois, it must become the breeding ground of the Samurai. It must cease in fact to be a middle class and turn itself into an aristocracy, an aristocracy not of birth or landed possessions, not of intellect, not of wealth and commercial enterprise, but of character and action. India must recover her faculty for self-sacrifice, courage and high aspiration. Such a transformation is the work which has been set before itself by the new Nationalism; this is at the back of all its enthusiasm, audacity & turbulence and provides the explanation of all that has shocked and alarmed the wise men and the elders in the movement in Bengal. The new Nationalism is a creed, but it is more than a creed; it is a method, but more than a method. The new Nationalism is an attempt at a spiritual transformation of the nineteenth century Indian; it is a notice of

dismissal or at least of suspension to the bourgeois and all his ideas and ways and works, a call for men who will dare & do impossibilities, the men of extremes, the men of faith, the prophets, the martyrs, the crusaders, the [. . .] & rebels, the desperate venturers and reckless doers, the initiators of revolutions. It is the rebirth in India of the Kshatriya, the Samurai.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 1091-108)



‘THE ONE THING THAT COUNTS . . .’

February 20, 1914

THE only thing that is important, the one thing that counts, is the will to be identified more and more completely with Thee, to unite our consciousness with Thy absolute Consciousness, to be more and more the peaceful, calm, disinterested, strong servitor of Thy sovereign law, Thy loving Will.

O Lord, give me the peace of perfect disinterestedness, the peace which makes Thy Presence effective, Thy intervention efficacious, the Peace ever triumphant over all bad will, all obscurity.

Lord, very humbly I pray to Thee that I may be equal to my task, that nothing in me, conscious or unconscious, may betray Thee by neglecting to serve Thy sacred mission.

In a silent devotion, I bow to Thee. . . .

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 79)

THE MOTHER'S MESSAGE FOR THE NEW YEAR, 1959

In the following pages we present some of the Mother's conversations connected with the New Year's Message of 1959, as its genesis is somewhat unusual. The message was based on an experience the Mother had after the children in her class in the Playground had no questions to ask her.

In her book, Growing up with the Mother, Tara Jauhar gives a general background:

On 6th September 1959, when I went to see the Mother, She asked me what I would like to have from Her. Spontaneously I said, "Mother, I would like you to resume the Wednesday classes." She took my hands in hers and said with great force and strength, almost in anger, "I have no intention of starting the classes again. The students were not interested, they did not come prepared; nobody asked any questions." She continued in this tone for quite some time. There I was, kneeling before Her, totally dazed and shaken, tears streaming down my face. I knew that what She said was true. Often She had scolded the six of us when we went to Her upstairs, for not asking any questions during the class, but She always excluded me from these scoldings because I was one of the few who did ask questions. Most probably the majority of the students did not open their mouth out of fear, timidity or shyness. The Mother tried many times in different ways to make us ask questions. She would point a finger at each child and say, "Do you have anything to ask? and you, and you . . ." But even this did not work. Later, She asked us to put our questions in writing, but the written questions generally came from the older sadhaks and not from the students themselves. . . .

(pp. 5-6)

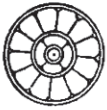
. . .

The Mother began her commentaries on Sri Aurobindo's Thoughts and Aphorisms in September 1958 in our Friday classes at the playground, but when the classes ended in December the commentaries also stopped . . .

(p. 34)

It was in the Friday class of 7 November 1958 that the Mother took up one of Sri Aurobindo's Aphorisms.

— Ed. Note



1959

At the very bottom of the
inconscience most hard and rigid
and narrow and stifling I struck
upon an almighty spring that cast
me up forthwith into a formless
limitless Vast vibrating with the
seeds of a new world.

1959

At the very bottom of the inconstance most hard and rigid and narrow and stifling I struck upon an almighty spring that cast me up forthwith into a formless limitless Vast vibrating with the seeds of a new world.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother — III, CWM 2nd Edn., Vol. 15, p. 173)

THE MOTHER'S COMMENTARY ON SRI AUROBINDO'S APHORISM

Either do not give the name of knowledge to your beliefs only and of error, ignorance or charlatanism to the beliefs of others, or do not rail at the dogmas of the sects and their intolerance.

Sri Aurobindo

(‘Thoughts and Aphorisms’, *CWSA* Vol. 12, p. 424)

THE dogmas of sects and the intolerance of religions come from the fact that the sects and religions consider their beliefs alone to be knowledge, and the beliefs of others to be error, ignorance or charlatanism.

This simple movement causes them to set up what they believe to be true as dogma and to violently condemn what others believe to be true. To think that your knowledge is the only true one, that your belief is the only true one and that others’ beliefs are not true, is to do precisely what is done by all sects and religions.

So, if you are doing exactly the same thing as the sects and religions, you have no right to mock them. You do the same thing without being aware of it because it seems quite natural to you. What Sri Aurobindo wants to make you understand is that when you say, “We are in possession of the truth and what is not this truth is an error” — though you may not dare say it in such a crude way — you are doing exactly the same thing as all the religions and all the sects.

If you objectify a little you will see that you have spontaneously, without realising it, established as knowledge everything you have learnt, everything you have thought, everything which has given you the impression of being particularly true and of major importance; and you are quite ready to contradict any different notion held by those who say, “No, no, it is like this, it is not like that.”

If you watch yourself in action, you will understand the mechanism of this intolerance and you will immediately be able to put an end to all these useless discussions. This brings us back to what I have already told you once: the contact which you have had with the truth of things, your personal contact — a contact which is more or less clear, profound, vast, pure — may have given *you*, as an individual, an interesting, perhaps even a decisive experience; but although this contact may have given you an experience of decisive importance, you must not imagine that it is a universal experience and that the same contact would give others the same experience. And if you understand this, that it is something purely personal, individual, subjective, that it is not at all an absolute and general law, then you can no longer despise the knowledge of others, nor seek to impose your own point of

view and experience upon them. This understanding obviates all mental quarrels, which are always totally useless.

Obviously, the first part of the aphorism can be taken as advice, but this is not what Sri Aurobindo meant when he wrote it; he wanted to make us conscious of the error we make ourselves but ridicule in others. This is a habit with us, not only in this particular case, but in all cases. It is rather remarkable that when we have a weakness — for example a ridiculous habit, a defect or an imperfection — since it is more or less part of our nature, we consider it to be very natural, it does not shock us. But as soon as we see this same weakness, this same imperfection, this same ridiculous habit in someone else, it seems quite shocking to us and we say, “What! He’s like that?” — without noticing that we ourselves are “like that”. And so to the weakness and imperfection we add the absurdity of not even noticing them.

There is a lesson to be drawn from this. When something in a person seems to you completely unacceptable or ridiculous — “What! He is like that, he behaves like that, he says things like that, he does things like that” — you should say to yourself, “Well, well, but perhaps I do the same thing without being aware of it. I would do better to look into myself first before criticising him, so as to make sure that I am not doing the very same thing in a slightly different way.” If you have the good sense and intelligence to do this each time you are shocked by another person’s behaviour, you will realise that in life your relations with others are like a mirror which is presented to you so that you can see more easily and clearly the weaknesses you carry within you.

In a general and almost absolute way anything that shocks you in other people is the very thing you carry in yourself in a more or less veiled, more or less hidden form, though perhaps in a slightly different guise which allows you to delude yourself. And what in yourself seems inoffensive enough, becomes monstrous as soon as you see it in others.

Try to experience this; it will greatly help you to change yourselves. At the same time it will bring a sunny tolerance to your relationships with others, the goodwill which comes from understanding, and it will very often put an end to these completely useless quarrels.

One can live without quarrelling. It seems strange to say this because as things are, it would seem, on the contrary, that life is made for quarrelling in the sense that the main occupation of people who are together is to quarrel, overtly or covertly. You do not always come to words, you do not always come to blows — fortunately — but you are in a state of perpetual irritation within because you do not find around you the perfection that you would yourself wish to realise, and which you find rather difficult to realise — but you find it entirely natural that others should realise it.

“How can they be like that? . . .” You forget how difficult you find it in yourself not to be “like that”!

Try, you will see. Look upon everything with a benevolent smile. Take all the things which irritate you as a lesson for yourself and your life will be more peaceful and more effective as well, for a great percentage of your energy certainly goes to waste in the irritation you feel when you do not find in others the perfection that you would like to realise in yourself.

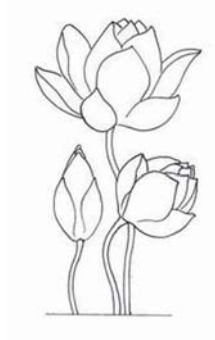
You stop short at the perfection that others should realise and you are seldom conscious of the goal you should be pursuing yourself. If you are conscious of it, well then, begin with the work which is given to *you*, that is to say, realise what you have to do and do not concern yourself with what others do, because, after all, it is not your business. And the best way to the true attitude is simply to say, "All those around me, all the circumstances of my life, all the people near me, are a mirror held up to me by the Divine Consciousness to show me the progress I must make. Everything that shocks me in others means a work I have to do in myself."

And perhaps if one carried true perfection in oneself, one would discover it more often in others.

7 November 1958

THE MOTHER

(*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 10, pp. 20-23)



THE MOTHER'S CONVERSATION OF NOVEMBER 8, 1958

I FOUND my message for the 1st of January . . . It was quite unforeseen. Yesterday morning, I thought, "All the same, I have to find my message, but what?" I was absolutely . . . like that, neutral, nothing. Then yesterday evening at the class (*of Friday, November 7*) I noticed that these children who had had a whole week to prepare their questions on the text had not found a single one! A terrible lethargy! A total lack of interest. And when I had finished speaking, I thought to myself, "But what IS there in these people who are interested in nothing but their personal little affairs?" So I began descending into their mental atmosphere, in search of the little light, of that which responds . . . And it literally pulled me downwards as into a hole, but in such a material way; my hand, which was on the arm of the chair, began slipping down, my other hand went like this (*to the ground*), my head, too! I thought it was going to touch my knees!

And I had the impression . . . It was not an impression — I saw it. I was descending into a crevasse between two steep rocks, rocks that appeared to be made of something harder than basalt, BLACK, but metallic at the same time, with such sharp edges — it seemed that a mere touch would lacerate you. It appeared endless and bottomless, and it kept getting narrower, narrower and narrower, narrower and narrower, like a funnel, so narrow that there was almost no more room — not even for the consciousness — to pass through. And the bottom was invisible, a black hole. And it went down, down, down, like that, without air, without light, except for a sort of glimmer that enabled me to make out the rock edges. They seemed to be cut so steeply, so sharply . . . Finally, when my head began touching my knees, I asked myself, "But what is there at the bottom of this . . . this hole?"

And as soon as I had uttered, "What is there at the bottom of this hole?" I seemed to touch a spring that was in the very depths — a spring I didn't see but that acted instantly with a tremendous power — and it cast me up forthwith, hurled me out of this crevasse into . . . (*arms extended, motionless*) a formless, limitless vast which was infinitely comfortable — not exactly warm, but it gave a feeling of ease and of an intimate warmth.

And it was all-powerful, with an infinite richness. It did not have . . . no, it didn't have any kind of form, and it had no limits (naturally, as I was identified with it I knew there was neither limit nor form). It was as if (because it was not visible), as if this vast were made of countless, imperceptible points — points that occupied no place in space (there was no sense of space), that were of a deep warm gold — but this is only a feeling, a transcription. And all this was absolutely LIVING, living with a power that seemed infinite. And yet motionless.

It lasted for quite some time, for the rest of the meditation.

It seemed to contain a whole wealth of possibilities, and all this that was formless had the power to become form.

At the time, I wondered what it meant. Later, of course, I found out, and finally this morning, I said to myself, "Ah, so that's it! It came to give me my message for the new year!" Then I transcribed the experience — it can't be described, of course, for it was indescribable; it was a psychological phenomenon and the form it took was only a way of describing the psychological state to oneself. Here is what I wrote down, obviously in a mental way, and I am thinking of using it as my message.

There was a hesitation in the expression, so I brought the paper and I want us to decide upon the final text together.

I have not described anything. I have only stated a fact (*Mother reads*):

At the very bottom of the inconscience most hard and rigid and narrow and stifling, I struck upon an almighty spring that cast me up forthwith into a formless, limitless Vast, generator of all creation.

And it is again one more proof. The experience was absolutely . . . the English word *genuine* says it.

Genuine and spontaneous?

Yes, it was not a willed experience, for I had not decided I would do this. It did not correspond to an inner attitude. In a meditation, one can decide, "I will meditate on this or on that or on something else — I will do this or that." For meditations, I usually have a kind of inner (or higher) perception of what has to be done, and I do it. But it was not that way. I had decided: nothing, to decide nothing, to be 'like that' (*gesture of turning upwards*).

And then it happened.

Suddenly, while I was speaking (it was while I was speaking), I felt, "Well really, can anything be done with such material?" Then, quite naturally, when I stopped speaking, oh! — I felt that I was being pulled! Then I understood. Because I had asked myself the question, "But what is HAPPENING in there behind all those forms? . . ." I can't say that I was annoyed, but I said to myself, "Well really, this has to be shaken up a bit!" And just as I had finished, something pulled me — it pulled me out of my body, I was literally pulled out of my body.

And then, down into this hole . . . I still see what I saw then, this crevasse between two rocks. The sky was not visible, but on the rock summits I saw . . . something like the reflection of a glimmer — a glimmer — coming from 'something' beyond, which (*laughing*) must have been the sky! But it was invisible. And as I descended, as if I were sliding down the face of this crevasse, I saw the rock edges;

and they were really black rocks, as if cut with a chisel, cuts so fresh that they glistened, with edges as sharp as knives. There was one here, one there, another there, everywhere, all around. And I was being pulled, pulled, pulled, I went down and down and down — there was no end to it, and it was becoming more and more compressing.¹ It went down and down . . .

And so, physically, the body followed. My body has been taught to express the inner experience to a certain extent. In the body there is the body-force or the body-form or the body-spirit (according to the different schools, it bears a different name), and this is what leaves the body last when one dies, usually taking a period of seven days to leave.² With special training, it can acquire a conscious life — independent and conscious — to such a degree that not only in a state of trance (in trance, it frequently happens that one can speak and move if one is slightly trained or educated), but even in a cataleptic state it can produce sounds and even make the body move. Thus, through training, the body begins to have somnambulistic capacities — not an ordinary somnambulism, but it can live an autonomous life.³ This is what took place, yesterday evening it was like that — I had gone out of my body, but my body was participating. And then I was pulled downwards: my hand, which had been on the arm of the chair, slipped down, then the other hand, then my head was almost touching my knees! (The consciousness was elsewhere, I saw it from outside — it was not that I didn't know what I was doing, I saw it from outside.) So I said, "In any case, this has to stop somewhere because if it continues, my head (*laughing*) is going to be on the ground!" And I thought, "But what is there at the bottom of this hole? . . ."

Scarcely had these words been formulated when there I was, at the bottom of the hole! And it was absolutely as if a tremendous, almighty spring were there, and then . . . (*Mother hits the table*) vrrrm! I was cast out of the abyss into a vastness. My body immediately sat straight up, head on high, following the movement. If someone had been watching, this is what he would have seen: in a single bound, vrrrm! Straight up, to the maximum, my head on high.

And I followed all this without objectifying it in the least; I was not aware of what it was nor of what was happening, nor of any explanation at all, nothing: it was 'like that'. I was living it, that's all. The experience was absolutely spontaneous. And after this rather . . . painful descent, phew! — there was a kind of super-comfort. I can't explain it otherwise, an *ease*,⁴ but an ease . . . to the utmost. A

1. Later Mother added, "stifling, suffocating".

2. Later Mother further explained: "When one is exteriorised, this body-spirit retains a connection with the being that has gone out, and what has gone out has a power over it — which is precisely why one isn't completely dead! The being that has gone out also has the power to make the body move."

3. Later, Mother explained: "I don't mean an autonomous will (it is the being that has gone out which has the power to make the body move), it has only acquired, through training, the capacity to express the will of the being with which it has kept a relationship through this link of the body-spirit which is broken only at death."

4. Original English.

perfect immobility in a sense of eternity — but with an extraordinary INTENSITY of movement and life! An inner intensity, unmanifested; it was within, self-contained. And motionless (had there been an outside, it would have been motionless in relation to that) and it was in a . . . life so immeasurable that it can only be expressed metaphorically as infinite. And with an intensity, a POWER, a force . . . and a peace — the peace of eternity. A silence, a calm. A POWER capable of . . . of EVERYTHING. Everything.

And I was not imagining nor objectifying it; I was living it with ease — with a great ease. And it lasted until the end of the meditation. When it gradually began fading, I stopped the meditation and left.

Later, after I returned (*to the Ashram*), I wondered, “What was that? What does it signify?” Then I understood.

That's all.

Now I am going to write it down clearly. Hand me a piece of paper.

(Mother begins recopying her message)

At the very bottom of the inconscience most hard and rigid . . .

Because generally, the inconscience gives the impression, precisely, of something amorphous, inert, formless, drab and gray (when formerly I entered the zones of the inconscient, that was the first thing I encountered). But this was an inconscience . . . it was hard, rigid, COAGULATED, as if coagulated to resist: all effort slides off it, doesn't touch it, cannot penetrate it. So I am putting,

. . . most hard and rigid and narrow

(the idea of something that compresses, compresses, compresses you)

and stifling

— yes, stifling is the word.

. . . I struck upon an almighty spring that cast me up forthwith into a formless, limitless vast, generator of all creation.

It was . . . yes, I have the feeling that it was not the ordinary creation, the primordial creation, but the SUPRAMENTAL creation, for it bore no similarity to the experience of returning to the Supreme, the origin of everything. I had utterly the feeling of being cast into the origin of the supramental creation — something that is already (how can it be expressed?) objectified from the Supreme, with the explicit goal of the supramental creation.

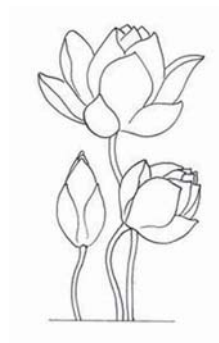
That was my feeling.

I don't think I am mistaken, for there was such a super-abundant feeling of power, of warmth, of gold . . . It was not fluid, it was like a powdering. And each of these things (they cannot be called specks or fragments, nor even points, unless you understand it in the mathematical sense, a point that occupies no space) was something equivalent to a mathematical point, but like living gold, a powdering of warm gold. I cannot say it was sparkling, I cannot say it was dark, nor was it made of light either: a multitude of tiny points of gold, nothing but that. They seemed to be touching my eyes, my face . . . and with such an inherent power and warmth — it was a splendour! And then, at the same time, the feeling of a plenitude, the PEACE of omnipotence . . . It was rich, it was full. It was movement at its ultimate, infinitely swifter than all one can imagine, and at the same time it was absolute peace, perfect tranquillity.

(Mother resumes her message)

I do not want to put the word . . . Unless, instead of putting “generator of all creation,” I put “of the new creation . . .” Oh, but then it becomes absolutely overwhelming! It is THAT, in fact. It is that. But is it time to say so? I don't know . . .

Generator of the new creation . . .



THE MOTHER'S CONVERSATION OF NOVEMBER 11, 1958

THE objectification of the experience came progressively, as always happens to me. When I have the experience, I am absolutely 'blank', like a newborn baby to whom things come just 'like that'. I don't know what is happening, and I expect nothing. How much time it has taken me to learn this!

There is no preliminary thought, preliminary knowledge, preliminary will: all those things do not exist. I am only like a mirror receiving the experience, the simplicity of a little child learning life. It is like that. And it is the gift of the Grace, truly the Grace: in the face of the experience, the simplicity of a little child just born. And it is spontaneously so, but deliberately too; in other words, during the experience I am very careful not to watch myself having the experience so that no previous knowledge intervenes. Only afterwards do I see. It is not a mental construction, nor does it come from something higher than the mind (it is not even a knowledge by identity that makes me see things); no, the body (when the experience is in the body) is . . . like that, what in English is called *blank*. As if it had just been born, as if just then it were being born with the experience.

And only little by little, little by little, is this experience put in the presence of any previous knowledge. Thus, its explanation and its evaluation come about progressively.

It is indispensable if one doesn't want to be arbitrary.

So in fact, only the final wording is correct, but from the point of view of the 'historical' unfolding, it is interesting to observe the passage. It was exactly the same phenomenon for the experience of the Supramental Manifestation. Both these things, the experience of November 7 and of the Supramental, occurred in the same way, identically: I WAS the experience, and nothing else. Nothing but the experience at the time it was occurring. And only slowly, while coming out of it, did the previous knowledge, the previous experiences, all the accumulation of what had come before, examine it and put it in its place.

This is why I arrive at a verbal expression progressively, gropingly; these are not literary gropings — it is aimed at being precise, specific and concise at the same time.

When I write something, I don't expect people to understand it, but I try to avoid the least possible distortion of the experience or the image in this kind of 'shrinking' towards expression.

What is this spring?

The spring? It means exactly this: in the deepest depths of the Inconscient is the supreme spring that makes us touch the Supreme. It is like the Supreme making us touch the Supreme: that is the almighty spring. When you arrive at the very bottom of the Inconscient, you touch the Supreme.

So that is the shortest path!

Not the shortest path! Already for me, it was hard to touch the bottom of the Inconscient, but for others it would take an eternity.

It is something similar to what Sri Aurobindo has written in 'A God's Labour'.

Was it the Supreme at the very bottom of the Inconscient who cast you up directly to the Supreme?

Yes. Because at the very bottom of the Inconscient is the Supreme. It is the same idea as the highest height touching the deepest depth. The universe is like a circle — it is represented by the serpent biting its tail, its head touching its tail. It means that the supreme height touches the most material matter, without any intermediary. I have already said this several times. But that was the experience. I didn't know what was happening. I expected nothing and . . . it was stupendous — in a single bound, I sprang up! If someone had had his eyes open, I assure you he would have had to laugh: I was bent over, like this, more and more, more and more, more and more, my head was just about to touch my knees when suddenly — vrrrm! Straight, straight up, my head upright in a single bound!

But as soon as you want to express it, it escapes like water running through your fingers; all the fluidity is lost, it evaporates. A rather vague, poetic or artistic expression is much truer, much nearer to the truth — something hazy, nebulous, undefined. Something not concretised like a rigid mental expression — this rigidity that the mind has introduced right down into the Inconscient.

This vision of the Inconscient . . . (*Mother remains gazing for a moment*) it was the MENTAL Inconscient. Because the starting point was mental. A special Inconscient — rigid, hard, resistant — with all that the mind has brought into our consciousness. But it was far worse, far worse than a purely material Inconscient! A 'mentalised' Inconscient, as it were. All this rigidity, this hardness, this narrowness, this fixity — a FIXITY — comes from the presence of the mind in creation. When the mind was not manifested, the Inconscient was not like that! It was formless and had the plasticity of something that is formless — the plasticity has gone.

It is a terrible image of the Mind's action in the Inconscient.

It has made the Inconscient aggressive — it was not so before. Aggressive, resistant, OBSTINATE. That was not there before.

Yes, that's it. It was not an 'original' Inconscient. It was a mentalised Inconscient.

With all that the mind has brought in in the way of OPPOSITION — of resistance, hardness, rigidity.

It would be interesting to mention this.

Because the starting point, precisely, was to look into the mental unconsciousness of these people. It was the mental Inconscient. Well, the mental Inconscient REFUSES to change — which is not true of the other one; the other is nothing, it doesn't exist, it is not organised in any way, it has no way of being, whereas this one is an ORGANISED Inconscient — organised by a beginning mental influence. A hundred times worse!

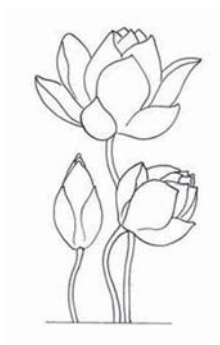
This is a very interesting point to note.

It is not the experience, which I had once before, of the original Inconscient. The experience I had this time is of the Inconscient that has undergone the influence of the Mind in creation. It has become . . . It has become a FAR greater obstacle than before. Before, it did not even have the power to resist, it had nothing, it was truly unconscious. Now it is an Inconscient organised in its refusal to change!

It was a very new experience.

That's where we are.

And this almighty spring is the perfect image of what is happening — what must happen, what will happen — FOR EVERYONE: suddenly, one is cast forth into the vast.



THE MOTHER'S CONVERSATION OF NOVEMBER 15, 1958¹

TRULY speaking, perhaps one is never rid of the hostile forces as long as one has not permanently emerged into the Light, above the lower hemisphere. There, the term 'hostile forces' loses its meaning; they become only forces of progress, they force you to progress. But to see things in this way, you have to get out of the lower hemisphere, for below, they are very real in their opposition to the divine plan.

It was said in the ancient traditions that one could not live for more than twenty days in this higher state without leaving one's body and returning to the supreme Origin. Now this is no longer true.

It is precisely this state of perfect Harmony beyond all attacks that will become possible with the supramental realisation. It is what all those who are destined for the supramental transformation will realise. The hostile forces know it well; in the supramental world, they will automatically disappear. Having no more utility, they will be dissolved without our having to do anything, simply through the presence of the supramental force. So now they are being unleashed with a fury in a negation of everything, everything.

The link between the two worlds has not yet been built, but it is in the process of being built; this was the meaning of the experience of February 3, 1958: to build a link between the two worlds. For both worlds are indeed there — not one above the other, but within each other, in two different dimensions. Only, there is no communication between them; they overlap, as it were, without being connected. In the experience of February 3, I saw certain people from here (and from elsewhere) who already belong to the supramental world in a part of their being, but there is no connection, no link. But now the hour has come in universal history for this link to be built.

What is the relationship between this experience of February 3 and that of November 7 (the almighty spring)? Is what you found in the depths of the Inconscient this same Supramental?

The experience of November 7 was a further step in the building of the link between the two worlds. Where I was cast was clearly into the origin of the supramental creation — all this warm gold, this tremendous living power, this sovereign peace. And once again I saw that the values governing the supramental world have nothing to do with our values here, even the values of our highest wisdom, even those we consider the most divine when we live constantly in a divine Presence: it is utterly different.

1. The Mother is speaking of an experience she had on November 13, 1958.

Not only in our state of adoration and surrender to the Supreme, but even in our state of identification, the QUALITY of the identification is different depending upon whether we are on this side, progressing in this hemisphere, or have passed to the other side and have emerged into the other world, the other hemisphere, the higher hemisphere.

The quality or the kind of relationship I had with the Supreme at that moment was entirely different from the one we have here — even the identification had a different quality. One can very well understand that all the lower movements are different but this identification by which the Supreme governs and lives in us was the summit of our experience here — well, the way He governs and lives is different depending on whether we are in this hemisphere here or in the supramental life. And at that moment (*the experience of November 13*), what made the experience so intense was that I came to perceive vaguely both these states of consciousness at once. It was almost as if the Supreme Himself were different, or our experience of Him. And yet, in both cases, it was a contact with the Supreme. It is probably how we perceive Him or the way in which we translate it that differs, but the fact is that the quality of the experience is different.

In the other hemisphere, there is an intensity and a plenitude which are translated by a power different from the one here. How can I formulate it? — I cannot.

The quality of the consciousness itself seems to change. It is not something higher than the summit we can attain here, it is not one MORE rung, not that. Here, we have reached the end, the summit, but . . . it's the quality that is different. The quality, in the sense that a fullness, a richness, a power is there (this is a translation, you see, in our way), but there is a 'something' that . . . that eludes us. It is truly a new reversal of consciousness.

When we begin living the spiritual life, a reversal of consciousness takes place which for us is the proof that we have entered the spiritual life; well, yet another occurs when we enter the supramental world.

And probably each time a new world opens up, there will again be a new reversal. This is why even our spiritual life, which is such a total reversal compared to ordinary life, seems something still so . . . so totally different when compared to this supramental consciousness that the values are almost opposite.

It can be expressed in this way (but it's quite approximate, more than diminished or deformed): it's as if our entire spiritual life were made of silver, whereas the supramental life is made of gold — as if our entire spiritual life here were a vibration of silver, not cold but simply a light, a light that goes right to the summit, an absolutely pure light, pure and intense; but in the other, in the supramental world, there is a richness and a power that make all the difference. This whole spiritual life of the psychic being and of all our present consciousness that appears so warm, so full, so wonderful, so luminous to the ordinary consciousness, well, all this splendour seems poor in comparison to the splendour of the new world.

I can explain the phenomenon like this: successive reversals such that an EVER NEW richness of creation will take place from stage to stage, making whatever came before seem so poor in comparison. What to us seems supremely rich compared to our ordinary life, appears so poor compared to this new reversal of consciousness. Such was my experience.

Last night, my effort to understand what was missing in order to help you completely and truly come out of the difficulty reminded me of what I said the other day about Power, the transforming power, the true realising power, the supramental power. When you enter that, when you suddenly surge into that Thing, then you see — you see that it is truly almighty in comparison to what we are here. So once again, I touched it, I experienced both states simultaneously.

But as long as this is not an accomplished fact, it will still be a progression — a progression, an ascension; you gain a little, you gain some ground, you rise higher and higher. But as long as the new reversal has not taken place, it's as if everything had still to be done. It is a repetition of the experience below, reproduced above.

(silence)

And each time, you have the feeling of having lived on the surface of things. It's a feeling that is repeated over and over again. With each new conquest, you feel that until then you had lived only on the surface of things — on the surface of the realisation, on the surface of 'surrender', on the surface of power. It was only the surface of things, the surface of the experience. Behind the surface, there is a depth, and only when one enters into this depth does one touch the True Thing. And it is the same experience each time: what seemed a depth becomes the surface. A surface, with all that it entails of inaccuracy, yes, of artificiality — artificial — an artificial transcription. It feels like something not really alive, a copy, an imitation: it's an image, a reflection, but not THE Thing itself. You step into another zone and you feel you have uncovered the Source and the Power and the Truth of things; then this source and power and truth in turn become an appearance, an imitation, a mere transcription in comparison to something concrete: the new realisation.

(silence)

Meanwhile, we should acknowledge that we don't have the key, it is not yet in our hands. Or rather, we know quite well where it is, and there is only one thing to do: the perfect 'surrender' Sri Aurobindo speaks of, the total surrender to the divine Will whatever happens, even in the dark of night.

There is night and sun, night and sun, and night again, many nights, but one must cling to this will for 'surrender', cling as through a storm, and put everything into the hands of the Supreme Lord. Until the day when the Sun shall shine forever, the day of total Victory.

**“GRACE” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

What do you think of these few lines?

Take all my shining hours from me,
But hang upon my quiet soul's
Pale brow your dream-kiss like a gem.
Let life fall stricken to its knee,
If unto lone-faced poverty
You give your blessing's diadem.
Make of these proud eyes beggar-bowls,
But only drop your smile in them . . .

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is very good.

16 March 1935

ADDENDUM

[Excerpt from Life-Poetry-Yoga, Personal Letters, Vol. 2, by Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), published by The Integral Life Foundation, 1995, USA, pp. 76-78:]

. . . On grace in general I may hazard two remarks. First, it is inexplicable because it does not seem to act in a manner fitting the present circumstances. But I conceive grace as taking into account all the secrets of the past and all the mysteries of the future — the two unknowns lying hidden in our own depths which are open to the Divine's all-penetrating gaze. They form to that gaze a part of the present — a store of possibilities at the bottom of the very stream running from moment to moment. Secondly, take that sweetest sign of grace: the Mother's smile. Sri Aurobindo once observed that by an irony of fate the subject of this smile had caused a great deal of misery. People moaned and groaned, thinking that the Mother didn't smile at them during Pranam because she was angry with them or because they were in a most depraved condition, even though they were not aware of any depravity! It has been explained that merely a smile does not show approval. It may be just formal. On the other hand, the absence of it may be due to the Mother's being absorbed in some

inner working on the sadhak in front of her. Again, if there was an inner understanding the Mother did not need to show her approval by a smile. Thus I never saw her beaming to Nolini or Amrita. They never took much time over the Pranam and I could see the lack of formality and the brief quiet intimacy that was sufficient on either side. But I also noticed that whenever there was on the part of the sadhak a leap of the psychic being, the Mother's face was invariably wreathed in smiles. I have a poem called "Grace" in which the psychic being is offering itself wholly and asking for no boon of greatness or good fortune and is ready for all privation from the worldly viewpoint provided it could have from the Mother the sure sign of her recognition of it and the supreme gift of her all-enrapturing all-enriching love:

Take all my shining hours from me,
 But hang upon my quiet soul's
 Pale brow your dream-kiss like a gem.
 Let life fall stricken to its knee,
 If unto lone-faced poverty
 You give your blessing's diadem.
 Make of these proud eyes beggar-bowls,
 But only drop your smile in them.

Here the inevitable link is flashed out between the psychic being's self-giving and the Divine's grace as manifested in that outbreak of plenary sweetness on the Mother's lips, her smile. I may generalise that any time the deep soul in us cries out to the Divine, the Divine's grace unfailingly responds. One aspect of the supra-rational logic of the Infinite behind the Infinite's magic which exceeds our rationality is this spontaneous relationship between these two phenomena.

Let me offer a small incident from my own life to illustrate that relationship. The period from the Mother's birthday on February 21, 1928 and Sri Aurobindo's on August 15 of the same year was for me a luminously crucial one. Although ostensibly an intellectual, I longed from the very start to have an opening in the heart-centre. The Mother, in order to make it easier for me, told me in what she considered terms most intelligible to me: "Think of or picture your heart as an open book." I somehow felt a little disappointed and said to myself: "What? Again a book? I am tired of being bookish!" As I had asked the Mother several times to let me have a profoundly emotional awakening to her divinity, a few months after her birthday a sudden opening took place. But it could not last. It even depended on whether I lay on my back in bed or on my side! Lying on my back used to pull shut the aperture. When I told this to the Mother she laughed and so did Sri Aurobindo on her telling him that my psychic being peeped or drew back according to the lying posture of my body! But one day, even though I was lying on my back, there was a tremendous opening. I could hardly bear the ecstasy. I was breathless with

unbounded bliss. Depth beyond depth seemed to bring forth a heavenly state — an indescribable enchantment of laughing flame and living fragrance rising far and far towards some marvellous Beauty. Hours and hours were spent in a felicitous aspiration. One early morning the call was so sweetly intense that I had to go to the Ashram, climb nearly half the staircase leading from outside Amrita’s office to the Meditation Hall upstairs. I stood on the first landing all alone, yearning with all my heart towards the first floor where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo lived. All the doors were closed, but my body felt inwardly like one big open door of devotion. A few minutes passed. Then all of a sudden the door to the Meditation Hall swung outward and the Mother stood on the threshold looking at me with a smile. “Would you like to come in?” she asked. “Of course Mother,” I cried out and quickly went up. She took me in by the hand and kept me with her for a while. After this incident I could never dissociate divine grace from the soul’s utter leap towards the Supreme Beloved.

(2.6.1990)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

There is no process. The will acts of itself when the mind and vital agree as in the case of a desire. If the desire is not satisfied, it goes on hammering, trying to get it, insisting on it, repeating the demand, making use of this person or that person, this device or that device, getting the mind to support it with reasons, representing it as a need that must be satisfied etc. etc. till the desire is satisfied. All that is the evidence of a will in action. When you have to use the will for the sadhana, you have not the same persistence, the mind finds reasons for not getting on with the effort, as soon as the difficulty becomes strong it is dropped, there is no continuity, no keeping of the will fixed on its object.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1719)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of January 2010)

Chapter Six

Science and Mysticism (Cont.)

Ling-Shi-Shien, February 26, 1925

My very dear Papa and Maman,

My last letter (February 12) has gone via Siberia, but as this one contains a letter for *Le Temps*,¹ I don't dare send it the same way not knowing if the route is quite safe.

Your books and magazines are of considerable interest to me and they have been the starting point of numerous reflections. Alas, I have already finished reading all of them. I have prepared a long list of books (they will come to a hundred and odd francs) which I would have liked to ask you for, but I dare not do it because it may be that I will be gone before they arrive. To tell you the truth, I have **no certainty**, but, as Spring arrives, I shall probably have to take a decision. Personally, I am in a hurry to get back to the life of the mass, but perhaps I ought to stay here a few more months or even a year. It does not much appeal to me, but the experiences which I am going through are probably impossible to have elsewhere. Well, we shall see in a month or two. Also, please do not yet send me the money for this letter to the magazine *Le Temps* (if it is accepted); keep it with you till I have some idea of what I am going to do. But, whatever I do, be sure that I am in a hurry to see you again as much as you, and that if I stay here, it is because I really think that it is necessary, not for pleasure or laziness. I want to be particularly sure, on returning to the world, of what I shall do there and not to be in that state of divided uncertainty in which I formerly was.

Of course, write to me still and even send me the journals (*Revue métapsychique* and *Voile d'Isis*, if it is possible). In this envelope, in addition to the letter on "The

1. [MI Ed. Note: Annexure B in the book. We will carry this in the next issue of Mother India.]

Festivals of the New Year in Mongolia”, I am enclosing some thoughts² which came to me on reading the books received from Papa. I am sending a copy to the Orpheus Lodge (of Tokyo).³ They have no great merit, but I think they will show you some of my ideas better than a long letter can. It is understood that this is only a small part of what I think and at present it touches only on science.

My life has not undergone any change since my arrival, I have described a little of it to you in my last letter. It is as cold as ever but fortunately the sun shines everyday. It does not matter, it is not a pleasant climate and the life of the people is very hard. Besides, it is a wonder how, given the aridity of the soil, they find the means to live with two out of three becoming lamas, that is to say, not producing anything materially. I do not think that in our country the proportion, even taking into account on one side all the intellectuals (scholars, doctors, etc.), can be so large. It must be said that the standard of life is quite rudimentary.

Upon my word, it is a pity. All the same, please send me the two books: Brillouin’s *The Theory of the Quanta and the Atom of Bohr* which costs 15 francs, and C. Jinarajadasa’s *The Occult Evolution of Humanity*, 9 francs. It will not be a very great loss in case I have gone elsewhere, and then I shall try to trace them. About the others we shall see.

I am not going to talk to you any more about that today and I embrace you very affectionately.

Signed: Philippe

P.S. In what situation am I *vis-à-vis* The Bridges and Causeways [Ponts et Chaussées]? Can I still return to it? Do you know anything about it?⁴

* * *

2. It is about the note entitled “Modern Science and Occultism”. In the domain of cosmology, Philippe brings in some scientific theories of geology or of physics, some traditional doctrines or some myths like “The Cycle of Brahma”, “The Ourobouros” or “The Egg of Kneph”. Then he gives a comparative study of the methods of occultism and those of science. Finally, he presents enthusiastically the new “Metapsychical Science” launched around the 1920’s by Professor Charles Richet, Doctor Geley and Robert and R. Sudre. . . better known today under the name of parapsychology!

3. Founded by Philippe.

4. Silvain Dreyfus’ letter dated May 4, 1925, confirms that Philippe could request at any time to be taken back into the service and that he would then be placed in one of the vacant posts.

Ling-Shi-Shien, April 23, 1925

My dear Papa,

I have received, a few days back (the 16th), your letters of February 6, as well as the three books which you have sent me (two on Einstein and one on the mystics). I thank you very much for them. Regarding the books by Steiner, I expected somewhat that you might not like to send them and that is why I wrote to you on this subject in my next letter (which did not seem to have reached you at the moment of writing to me).

However, on reading your letter, I suddenly understood something which had been evading me all the time, which I could not grasp: it is **the nature of the separation** which exists between us, a chasm which I feel and which, in spite of my efforts, I am unable to fill. And it is a subject so important that I take the liberty of speaking openly to you about it.

While speaking about these books you write this significant sentence: “In all conscience I cannot send them to you, **no more than I would send you morphine or cocaine if I knew you to be addicted to them.**” This is what is revealing to me. It proves that, in spite of all the tolerance and broadmindedness which you demonstrate, you have not managed to consider my case as anything other than an illness, as a pathological condition placing me outside the pale of **normal sanity** of the people with whom you mix and who, for you, are the **only reasonable people**.

The following conclusion ensues: **deep down**, more or less consciously, you deny me the moral right to follow the path that I have chosen. By **right**, I mean the liberty of choice that is generally granted to a sane person to choose his line of conduct, his religion, his philosophy, his career. That **you do not accept**, happily, my conduct (moral and material) is moreover evident from your letters. That you do not accept it implies that you are sure that this line of conduct (philosophical, etc.) is absolutely unreasonable and that, consequently I am actually a sick man suffering from a mental derangement which makes me incapable of discrimination. Therefore have I been suddenly and incomprehensively affected by a disease (of the will-power or of the imagination, it could be said — it does not matter) which has for three years kept me under the influence of impostors. So everything revolves around that!

It is in this state of mind that you open my letters, (I say you, because you are the head of our family, both naturally and by the qualities of the mind and experience, and Maman and Albert really judge the truth by following your lead) . . . “Ah, here is a letter from Philippe! Has he at last regained his sanity, this poor Philippe?” And it is still in this manner that you talk about me to your friends and the whole family. That some relatives, more or less close, who know me very little and who have relatively little interest in me, do not stop to think philosophically about my condition,

I accept, and do not hold it against them. But that the three of you, and particularly you Papa, my beloved father, cannot make the effort that your heart demands, that astonishes me. That is the reason why, in spite of my goodwill, I cannot write to you **in complete trust** what I think, my ideal, my expectations, in one word, to let you penetrate most deeply into my inner life (which is of sole importance at present). However I do what I can and my preceding letters are witness of that.

Is it necessary to argue logically? Must I ask you if you would like all men to become doctors under the pretext that the ideal of the doctor is beautiful, or become scientists because the ideal of the man of science, digging out the secrets of nature, is also beautiful? Etc. You admit, I know it, that the ideals ought to be different as are the capacities and the natural gifts. It is that, moreover, which makes the richness and the beauty of life, more than this play of the ideals which clash with one another.

Why does my ideal make you think of me as a deranged person (at least for the time being)? Am I the only one of my kind? I admit that there are not many such in the French bourgeois society (no irony intended) of the year 1925. But, not counting all the Theosophists (there are 50,000 of them in the world, all deranged!), the occultists, the mystics (hysterics), one has only to go to India to see that my case is far from exceptional; there, on the contrary, it will be normal (my Hindu friends introduced me to Tagore saying that I was completely a Hindu). Even Japan would not reject me (my director, Mr. Hoshi, told me before my departure that I was more oriental than occidental). He judged me from my general conduct, because he does not know anything about my philosophical ideas. Anyway, I do not in the least find myself a loner among the Occidentals. Paul Claudel (a mystic ambassador) considered me well-balanced and sane. But it is useless to sing my panegyric, is it not?

In history, the mystics, be they Neo-Platonists or Platonists, Hindus, Taoists, Buddhists or even Catholics, — are they all crazy, or at least, **definitely and indisputably, are they in the wrong?** Can you affirm it? Are you then sure of the truth? I know that you do not profess it. But then how illogical you are with yourself: you say you are not sure of anything, **except that one can know nothing.** Of that you are sure, and I am crazy because I think that one **can** know. This is not your habitual broadmindedness regarding philosophical ideas, but is closer to the sectarian spirit of the Catholics, which you criticise with valid reason. If one of the Catholics told his son: “Do not read books by Renan, they are bad books!”, you would see there the sign of a narrow mind. The facts, that you find me imbalanced, intoxicated or deluded and that you cannot accept my choice (which, moreover, is nothing but a personal effort towards the truth, nothing else), are closely connected. Not only does one not recognise a man’s right (moral) to intoxicate himself, but one uses all one’s influence and all one’s power to cure him (a Catholic would say, to convert him).

Before I continue, my dear father, I wish to tell you that if I talk to you sharply and passionately, it is not that I have forgotten either the respect that I owe you or the affection that binds us. You will understand my motive, I am sure of that, and you will not hold it against me.

I think that you cannot maintain, with your broad and enlightened mind and with the documentation that you possess, that my mystics — the occultists and all those who seek the truth outside the beaten paths and who can boast of having as patrons Pythagoras, Plato, Porphyry, Plotinus, and in general all the great philosophers of Antiquity when the divorce between the intellect and the intuition had not yet occurred, and of counting in their ranks saints like Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc, Paracelsus, Lao-Tzu, Mencius, Shankaracharya and so many others (we could add to them Bergson, Oliver Lodge etc.) — are less sane in mind than the semi-learned professors who see in thought the secretion of the brain and in mysticism the product of a morbid imagination or a depraved eroticism.

On what then is based this severe judgment about my mental state? All philosophical thought would grant me the liberty of following this path which I have followed, because it is neither **unreasonable** nor **harmful**, even though it has disadvantages and dangers, I do not deny it. I see only one explanation for this attitude: having felt a great grief at my departure (you do not know how much I have suffered), and on the other hand, the hopes, conscious or unconscious, which you had placed on me seeming frustrated to you, you have been led to think that I did not at all act sensibly. Then, thinking of it and speaking of it, this impression took root. Certain actions on my part increased this mistrust because they convinced you that I was dominated by an alien will. This appeal for money, in particular, is the only thing for which I really reproach myself in this adventure and for which I ask your pardon. I do not even seek to excuse myself for it (destitution etc.); I admit being definitely wrong to make this request to you, given the conditions of my departure. To close this parenthesis . . . Therefore all this led to your present judgement.

I am absolutely certain that, so long as you do not stop seeing in me either a poor victim of adventurers or somebody momentarily afflicted by a mental disorder, so long as you do not accept me **as I am**, with my good qualities and my defects, above all with my ideals and my aspirations, so long as you do not recognise in yourself and **that too happily**, my perfect liberty to lead my life, there will be this spiritual separation between us deeper than ever, a separation more painful than that of bodies because it will continue even if I were close to you.

Evidently, you must stop considering me to be crazy, but note well that it does not mean that you must accept my ideals as your own or even approve of them but only show me this robust confidence and this affection which will prompt you to

say, for example: “After all, our ideals are different, that is not astonishing and that does not diminish in any way my affection for him. Let him follow his own, may he find peace and happiness in that and I shall help him with my thoughts and my good wishes in his effort towards Truth and Beauty.” Beauty, Truth and Good are the ideals in which all can commune. Why not carry out this union of our souls in them? It is quite possible to love without wishing to impose one’s own way of seeing. Apart from other personal examples, I can assure you that, when I think of you, and that is particularly often in my meditations, in which systematically I send you my powers of love, light and peace, never, never do I try to influence you in any way! I have never even desired that you follow the same path or that you accept my philosophical ideas. My wishes have always been larger, I assure you, and not less weak or less loving for that. I must say that this tolerance, combined with a sincere desire for understanding, is one of the traits of my philosophy and that I consider myself as particularly fortunate to be gifted with that.

Please understand me well. I do not wish you to think: “Philippe wants that we stop taking interest in him.” Oh no, it is something else that I desire! It is the warm affection which **uplifts** and **helps**, instead of hindering with sterile regrets. What will my future path be, I know nothing of it (in this, I am absolutely sincere), but whatever it may be, there would be between us this union, above all creeds, all philosophical discussions, this union which exists in our souls but which your mind energetically refuses to accept. And instead of making you lose interest in me, it is a much greater participation that you would have with my whole life. Admittedly, it is easier, while speaking to friends and close relatives, to use the common (that is the word) position of treating me as the poor deluded victim, or some such other thing . . . When I think that Maman has complained that I did not write often even though, during two years, it is I who have not seen her handwriting and that even your letters have been a remarkable rarity during a whole period and that in spite of my pleadings!

There would be a nobler, more beautiful attitude which would bring us closer; it is to say: “Leave him be, leave him be, Philippe follows his path. His ideal is beautiful and **legitimate**. I hope that he succeeds and attains the Truth. I am with him in his tribulations and I feel his heart close to mine.”

This is what this letter intends to ask you; I have realised that it is necessary, indispensable. On your response will probably depend the nature of our relations, that is to say **the degree of intimacy and of confidence** which will exist between us. I must affirm that, on the other hand, it will not in any way affect either the respect, or the gratitude, or the deep affection that I have for you. But this affection, which would like to find expression in a communion, often withdraws to the interior, even fearing to cause suffering through a misunderstood expansion.

Shall I add a few more words still to this subject? You write: “All the explana-

tions (of the world), which one wished to give of it, have always been, after a few generations, judged as being the result of a delirium or a deception.” (These then are the alternatives that you see.)

There would be two groups of teachings to be distinguished:

1) Those which are concerned with the nature of things, the explanation of the world, of its causes and effects. That, I grant, has little chance of being within the reach of our logical reason. It is even the cause for which occultists attach little value to the so-called reason and make use of symbols which cannot be understood except by superior faculties. But, let us say no more about it, this is not the place to discuss this question. Meanwhile I shall quote a sentence from Maimonides who was neither an occultist nor a mystic but a rabbi and a philosopher whom the Jews consider as one of the most wise commentators of the Bible (I chose the Bible because it contains the most absurd of all the accounts of the Creation):

He who would discover the true sense of the Book of Genesis must be very careful not to divulge it. **This is a maxim that all our sages repeat to us,** above all what concerns the work of the six days. If somebody discovered its true sense, by himself or with another’s help, he must maintain silence or, if he spoke, he must do it in terms so obscure and enigmatic, as I do it myself, leaving to those who are capable of understanding me, the task of guessing the rest.

This sentence, and there are similar ones even with the Church Fathers, more than any other reason, must provide much to think about.

2) Those which treat all that concerns the efforts that man must make to reach the superior perception, the ethico-mystic side, so to say. And, on this subject, the teachings of the inspired sages are clear and eternally true. Neither the *Upanishads* which are the most ancient books that we know of, nor the *Bhagavad Gita*, nor the writings of Plato, nor *The Imitation of Christ* have been regarded as the fruits of a delirium or of a hoax. I hope that you do not put yourself among those who hold them as such. Emile Burnouf (an Orientalist, not a Theosophist) speaking of the *Bhagavad Gita* says:

This book is probably the most beautiful which has emerged from the human hand. Never has one pronounced with more force the Unity of the absolute principle of things, the essence and the culminating point of the Indian philosophy. Thence results an ethics **which has never been surpassed**, an ethics not only theoretical but practical par excellence, uniting the noblest feelings of human nature with the stoic law of disinterestedness.

But let us stop! However, so that you may understand, if possible, my present ideas, I am sending you a few pages written recently.⁵ They consist of nothing more than some notes which I propose to develop later, and moreover, they touch only on a particular subject, not at all the philosophical synthesis.

There you will see the points of contact with the orthodox Catholic Mysticism on the subject of which you have sent me a book, and which I consider a degradation due to the dogmatic influence of the Church, an influence which has created this rupture between the wisdom, the love and the creative activity, an influence so painful in spite of the beauty and the purity of the soul of these mystics. How far from the purely emotional states of a saint is the perfect equilibrium realised by a Sankaracharya, where the intelligence becomes a perfect instrument of the higher knowledge and where the heart serves to assure the purity of the vibrations necessary for the perception!

I am a mystic because I do not accept any other guidance except the inner guidance, but, I repeat, it is the perfection realised in the human being that my ideal strives for, a perfection of wisdom, of knowledge, of beauty, of love, of creative power. According to me (perhaps I am proud), Saint Theresa has seen only one half of the way but that half is necessary. Only, the temperaments are different, and my path, even for this first half, is somewhat, though not essentially, different from that of the saint of Avila.

In what I write there is not, naturally, the least resentment that you have not sent me Steiner's books. If you refuse to send them to me even in the manner that I had specified in my letter of mid-December, I must make other arrangements to get the books that interest me. You must understand that I am not here only to study scientific books. For that I would be better off in France. They form part of my work, but only in their place and in a certain proportion. Naturally you are absolutely free to do as you think best in this matter.

5. The note "The Spiritualisation of Life" begins thus: "The path of the disciple is the spiritualisation of life. To spiritualise our life is to bring the divine to manifest himself in us and by us — nothing else. The aim is to become a pure and impersonal channel of the unique Force which penetrates and animates the world under its three aspects of Love, of Wisdom and of Creative Power (Beauty, Truth, Good)."

It is followed by the quotations from "The Light on the Path", from the Sutras, from the Tantras and from Zen poems, from the Cabbalist Johannes Trithemius, from the book *Rose-Cross and the Alchemists* by Fr. Hartmann, from the book *Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism* by W. M. MacGovern, from the "De Signatura Rerum" by Jacob Boehme, from Paracelsus, from Jean Tauler, finally from the writings of Aurobindo Ghose: *Yogic Sadhana, The Yoga and its Objects, The Bhagavad Gita* . . .

It ends thus: "All through the very long ascent, the disciple, even though he may not often be conscious of it at the beginning, is helped, guided, encouraged by his master, his guru. Without the hand that supports, the heart that comforts, the love and the light that he radiates over his disciple, the path would be much too steep for our fragility and no hope of ever climbing it would be allowed to us. The Labours of Hercules accomplished with this puissant support, the disciple thenceforth rapidly glides towards the Divinity."

You ask me about my plans? My reply will seem strange to you: for the moment I try not to have them. All those I made in the last few months have been broken, and it has not been without suffering. All my attention is directed at what I am going to do **at present** and I have realised that to try to foresee the future is useless. When the hour of departure strikes, it is likely that it will not be as precipitate as my departure from Japan which happened in fifteen days, or as that from Europe.

Meanwhile I can confirm to you that I am not thinking of taking root here and that I am firmly persuaded that, after a certain lapse of time, I shall return to share the life and the work of men.

Not having any indication of the type of work that awaits me, it is difficult for me to reply to you about La Minelle, but I do not see any reason for selling it. Personally, I love it very much, and, since it does not cause you any more worry and on the contrary, it is pleasant and profitable, why not keep it? I am happy that the cooperative system is satisfactory for everybody. By what miracle is it thus? If everybody profits from it, who loses? Or is the organisation better with less wastage and fewer faults?

I wrote to Lang when I was in Peking. But as that is one of the many letters without reply, I do not know if he would like me to write to him still. Since you see him sometimes, sound him about it. I am very moved by his memories of me and by the fact that he has named his son Philippe; but he has another very intimate friend who has stayed with him, and who is also called Philippe. Perhaps in this way he has united his two friendships.

The world I knew must have changed so much: births, marriages, etc.! The world moves on and I too am changing without feeling the change as being painful; on the contrary, because it is only a throbbing revelation of life which is an unchangeable and immutable reality, a little like the ether of Einstein, the modern "universal substratum", which must not be conceived "as constituted of parts capable of being followed in time; the notion of movement must not be applied to it."⁶ And it is this which is the cause of all physico-chemical life and of movement! Are they not exactly the qualities that the mystics give to the spiritual principle of things? Immutability and homogeneity? (I do not identify ether with the soul of the world.)

No, I have not received any letters from Albert since he changed his work. I have sent him two letters at Bac-Kan; I do not know if they have reached him. I am very happy that he has been successful in his projects, to him they mean work in line with his liking and that it interests him: nothing can be better than that. Besides,

6. On the contrary, the theory of relativity takes note of the experiment of Michelson and Morley in 1887 and invalidates the theory of the ether, even though, in 1920, at the time of the Leyde Conference to which Philippe makes an obvious allusion, Einstein himself did not seem to be completely convinced of it.

Cf.: Review *La Jaune et la Rouge*, no. 547, August/September 1999, p. 46.

from all points of view, his new job is worthwhile and new possibilities are opening for him.

I am not writing any more to you today. I am waiting a little impatiently and quite understandably, a little anxiously, for the reply to this letter. And I am filling it with all my affectionate thoughts.

I embrace both of you with all my heart.

Signed: Ph. B. St Hilaire

My dear Maman,

On starting this letter I intended to write to you a few separate pages, but this one having taken gigantic proportions, I am writing you only a few words. For the rest, the letter to Papa will give you the same news. If I have written it to Papa, it is because it concerns him particularly as the one moulding the attitude of the whole family (you three) towards me.

Nothing has changed here: life is calm and monotonous, but at last Spring is coming, after the long Winter months. Only since the 15th of April, touches of green are seen in the fields and Nature is painfully waking up from her sleep.

Often I think of you and your aches and pains. Also I am glad to learn about the improvement in your condition.

If you have recent photos of yours, please send them to me. In my cell I have hung yours with those of Albert. All the thoughts that I have for you are loving and deep; they wish you to be calm, enlightened and strong.

I embrace you calmly.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Continuation of the letter of April 23, 1925 to Paul

Before posting this letter to you, I had the time to read the book on the Catholic mystics. As you have not sent it to me unintentionally, and this intention is not to intoxicate me still more, it must rather have been to detoxify me. Moreover, as you have underlined a passage, obviously intended for me, perhaps I should tell you a few things about it.

I found the book very interesting, above all, I must tell you, because of the large number of quotations which it contains and which again demonstrate to me

that of which I am profoundly convinced, **the universality** of the mystic experience. I have not studied the Catholic mystics very much and I have hardly read anything except the Life of Saint Theresa, a little of Madame Guyon and of Ruysbroeck. And I have always had a little distrust towards them, distrust due to the fact that they have not developed themselves **freely**, but under the constraint, brutal at times, of the Church and its dogmas. But I see that they have yet remained more independent than I thought, which is entirely to their credit.

In these pages that I am sending you, you will find some points in common; they are even numerous, but often considered from another point of view. Probably you will see there the symptoms of the illness which you lay on me. I can do nothing about it and defending myself will not serve any purpose.

What would you think of a man who wished to understand what a dynamo was by seeing it turn, by observing its variation of speed, its jolts, its heating, but who refused emphatically to learn what electricity was? Ah well, this is the effect that all the scientists have on me when they begin to study mysticism and everything associated with it. They do not go into the metaphysics and the real science of the relation between man and the universe. They know nothing of what man is — they only look at his external manifestations — not whence he comes, nor whither he goes, nor the forces that act in him. Thus, it is very true that the mystic experience leads to the annihilation of the consciousness — consciousness manifested in our world — during the state of ecstasy. And there is no need for an extensive study to know it because it is the **sought-for goal**; one has only to read any book on Hindu Yoga where *Samadhi* is spoken of.

What is more, this is the main criticism that I direct at **science**, it is that it proceeds by isolated compartments. The psychologist ignores everything and wants to forget everything about metaphysics. René Sudre (in *Revue métapsychique*), under the pretext of science, rejects the entire idea that the moral finality can have a role in psychic science; at a pinch, I would understand it if he spoke of chemistry, but of human evolution, it is a bit too much! These blind men do not see that the whole universe is one, that in essence there is no difference between the laws that govern the mineral kingdom and those that govern human evolution.

But science goes on. Already Einstein has grouped in a single theory all the laws of the world of form (physico-chemical), so long considered to be isolated. And one realises then the marvellous unity of the universe and the absolute generality of the cosmic laws. I want to say that the laws are the most general possible. Thus in what concerns the physical universe, one comes to see that the universe is subject to only one condition: “That of having a geometrical structure; that is the least that one can suppose, and one would not rise to a higher degree of generalisation.” By geometrical structure is meant that an event (the colliding of two automobiles, for example) which took place before an observer, occurred for all the others, whoever

they may be. And this unique condition suffices to lead, by simple mathematical consequences (resting, on the last analysis, on numbers), all the physico-chemical laws: gravity, existence and laws of electricity and of magnetism, etc. It is such that no God can even change these laws, to have, for example, bodies attract one another in inverse proportion to the cube of the distance. The universe, then, is fixed, **so far as the laws are concerned**, but regarding facts, it is evident that each intelligence can utilise the laws according to its convenience, or even ignore them!

But outside the physico-chemical domain, science is still chaotic. What does it know of life — which manifests itself by growth, by reproduction — of the sensation and of the psychic life of beings, of thought and of the self? Nothing, but it will know nothing so long as it does not take the step that Geley has taken, for example, admitting the unity of the universe, seeking to make the synthesis. Everything then is clear, at least, the broad lines emerge clearly.

Oh, how much there is to be said on this subject!

To return to mysticism, how is it possible to understand it if one looks at it from the outside without penetrating into its proper domain? I am not a Catholic, but I understand perfectly the least sentence of these mystics. Often I give them an entirely different interpretation, but I know the language, it is the same with the Hindus, the Buddhists and it applies to beings, to things, to the well-determined states of the soul.

If you read Steiner's chapters on *The Occult Science* where he speaks of the knowledge of the higher worlds, you would see there that all the occult exercises, which have for goal the development of the higher faculties, rightly aim at the retreat of the soul from the sensible subjects. You would see there, treated in an extremely logical manner, the detachment of the self which is happening now. It is a natural phenomenon. You will also see there why the states of real knowledge of the higher planes necessitate a total insensibility (of ecstasy) during their duration, and many other things.

Nevertheless, I thank you very much for this book; it has brought me some documents and a new point of view. That is already a great deal.

If mysticism interests you, there is Bertrand Russell's book (he is not a first comer) on *Mysticism and Logic*, but I do not know its contents.

Perhaps, one day I shall write a book on **universal mysticism**. . .

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

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

IN 1963, the film *Reach for the Sky* was screened at the Ashram Playground. The film was about the Second World War ace, Douglas Bader, who had lost both his legs in an air crash in 1931 and yet in 1938 was allowed to rejoin the RAF (Royal Air Force) as a fighter pilot to serve Britain during the Second World War — which he did with great distinction. He was famously known as ‘the legless pilot’.

On seeing the film, a disciple was fascinated and marvelled at Douglas Bader’s heroism and on 7th June 1963, wrote to the Mother:

Sweet Mother,

About the hero of the film Reach for the Sky, I said that nothing could ever discourage him. For even after having lost both legs in an accident, he vowed that he would continue his career as a pilot. He is a man of fantastic vitality, full of energy . . .

The Mother replied:

That is exactly the kind of determination one must have to practise the yoga of integral perfection.

(CWM, Vol. 16, p. 278)

The following is the story of Douglas Bader, sourced from the book *Reach for the Sky* on which the film was based. Douglas Bader is also of special interest for his stirring contribution towards the Battle of Britain, perhaps the most critical battle of the Second World War.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother started sending their Force to help the Allies prior to the Battle of Britain and the second portion of this article will reveal the effects of this Force. We will try to get a glimpse of the movements and developments of the War, during and prior to this period, and their implications through the military, political and psychological insight of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They had declared that WW II was ‘The Mother’s War’ — a battle between the Divine and Asuric forces. The defeat of the Allies at the Battle of Britain would have led to Hitler’s victory over England and Europe and subsequently would have led to Hitler’s world domination including India. In the history of mankind, the Battle of Britain was perhaps the most critical battle — for the German Air Force was far larger than the British — and an adverse result would have been an immeasurable calamity for human civilisation.

Sri Aurobindo observed:

. . . There was a time when Hitler was victorious everywhere and it seemed certain that a black yoke of the Asura would be imposed on the whole world . . .

(19 October 1946, *SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 169)

The time Sri Aurobindo is referring to was at the start of the Battle of Britain. Hitler's victory, in Sri Aurobindo's words, would have meant

. . . there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise.

(29 July 1942, *SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 394)

It could have delayed Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's work by centuries. Despite Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's calm and equanimity throughout the War, this period was perhaps one of the most trying, for besides the designs of Hitler and Stalin even the Ashram ran the risk being closed by the local French Government as several disciples (due to their anti-British stand) were sympathising with Hitler.

* * *

Douglas Bader (pronounced Bahder) was born on 21st February 1910. Earlier, the doctor had advised his mother that it could be life-threatening to deliver the baby as it was expected to be still-born. Mrs. Bader nevertheless kept her faith in the child and stood firm.

As a young schoolboy, Douglas was very self-driven, constantly pushing himself to be the best. At the age of thirteen he was captain of his cricket, rugby and football teams. In the final term he won every senior race in school sports that he could enter. Sadly, Douglas' public school education was getting too expensive for his parents. However, at the term's end through his resourcefulness he won a scholarship to St. Edward's School, Oxford. He was already asserting his freedom from his parents.

At his new school people liked his enthusiasm, straightforwardness and his warm personality. He was the youngest member of the school cricket team, ending the season with the best batting and bowling averages. As a mere 15-year-old he became a member of his school rugby team. He played against older and bigger boys as rough tackles did not ruffle him. He was also a boxer and an athlete. To further channel his excess energy he was given additional responsibility and was selected as a school prefect. In mid 1927 he suffered from rheumatic fever and almost died. The entire school prayed for him. This was the first of several near-fatal escapes.

After completing school Douglas was overly eager to join the RAF but his mother did not have the resources to pay the annual fees at the RAF College at Cranwell. So, instead, his self-driven personality won him a scholarship and he joined Cranwell in September 1928. Bader immensely enjoyed his time at Cranwell. He also had the timing and reflexes of a natural pilot. He was determined to be a fighter pilot and that along with rugby were his two great passions.

He made a name for himself in boxing by winning most of his bouts by knockouts even though he was of average height. Some in Cranwell looked at him as a super-boy whilst others looked at him as a rebel for it was difficult to curb him. Matters came to a head when he was asked to report to his commandant, Air Vice-Marshal Halahan. A former heavyweight boxing champion, he spoke to Bader in a quiet dispassionate voice, reviewing his misdemeanours, and at the end said, "You're young. I can understand your trouble, but the Air Force won't go on understanding. They don't want schoolboys here. They want men." Douglas crept out, feeling terribly belittled. To have his manhood questioned was the ultimate humiliation. Once the shock wore off, Flight Cadet Bader changed radically. He began to study vigorously and continued to excel in sports. A junior cadet, Rupert Leigh, said, "To us he was a sort of god who played every conceivable game and was the best player on every team!" His passing out report from Cranwell in 1930, described him as "Plucky, capable, head-strong."

In August 1930 Bader was selected for the RAF cricket team. A testimony to his versatility was that a month later, he played for a prestigious Rugby club. His flying abilities were so exceptional that he was selected to be in two distinguished aerobatics teams. In his eagerness to cross new frontiers he often broke strict orders of not flying below 500 feet. One particularly dangerous manoeuvre was the 'slow roll' at fifty feet above the ground. One loses elevation in a 'slow roll' and there is a risk of the engine turning off (which would certainly be fatal) when upside down. It was so hazardous an exercise that if detected it would lead to a court-martial. Low aerobatics were strictly forbidden though some ignored it and two pilots fatally crashed in a short span of time. Bader, however, belonged to that elite group of fighter pilots who needed to develop extraordinary skills through gut-feeling in order to successfully combat the enemy. But Bader was getting into a dangerous phase of over-confidence which comes to many pilots after they have tasted a little success.

In November 1931 Bader was picked for the prestigious Combined Services Rugby team. He was now a strong candidate for the England team.

14th December 1931 was a tragic day for Bader, the consequences of which would remain for rest of his life. A young pilot dared Bader to give a demonstration of dangerous low level aerobatics. Provoked, Bader took off and flew the plane just over the grass, literally grazing it. The wings were vertical when the left wing-tip hit the grass and brought the plane to a crashing halt. He suffered various injuries and

severe loss of blood. The doctor was unable to operate on him as Bader was in a state of shock. It was evident that he was dying, but astonishingly, his state soon improved enough and he could be operated on. After the operation he still hung on at the jaws of death, yet to regain consciousness. Providentially, Bader's eyes opened twenty-four hours later. He had come out of the throes of death but there was still a fair distance to cross. When the nurse told him that he had crashed in his aircraft he pondered vacantly, "What a bloody silly thing to do." Bader had lost his right leg in the operation and the doctor now had to amputate his left leg, otherwise it was certain he would die. After the second operation his pulse fluctuated precariously and twenty-four hours later he awoke to an intense pain in his amputated left leg. The pain was so excruciating that he had to be sedated with morphine. The doctor was doubtful whether the patient would survive. All depended on Bader's will to survive, his endurance, and his capacity to bear pain. There was a passing moment when he felt he was dying but just in the nick of time he managed to pull himself through. Ever since, he has never had the fear of death. Perhaps he was going through destiny's commando course. The pain returned and was so unbearable that Bader wanted to die. He was given more morphine. He plunged into unconsciousness for two days. Many of the hospital staff took a special interest in his survival as there was a certain spark about him. Finally he managed to come out of his coma.

The doctor now informed him, "Sorry, old man, but I had to take the other leg off below the knee, I couldn't save it. You're really lucky to be in the world still."

"That's all right, sir. I'll get some longer legs. I always wanted to be taller," was Bader's jocular reaction.

The doctor was still afraid that he might die. His left leg continued to hurt awfully and the morphine had to be monitored continuously. Soon the tide turned and Bader made a slow recovery. It was like being born again, — without the legs of course! He returned to his cheerful boisterous nature, cracking jokes with the nurses and with all those who came to visit him. To the nurses he was a heroic figure for having endured and survived a tragedy of such magnitude with courage and humour. Exactly a month after the crash, he was given a wheelchair and he learnt the art of steering himself in the garden. Having been bedridden for so long, he now soared like Jonathan Livingston Seagull. Thereafter, stumps were fitted to his amputated legs. But his left leg was so weak that it did not have the strength to support his body. After a few days, he could take a couple of steps — with the help of crutches — but he felt his left leg would collapse. Before long, he was a bit stronger and then doggedly practised. He was soon able to stump about the garden using the crutches as support. It was a battle of the will.

Unfortunately, the pain returned and this time it was the right leg. Bader had had another operation: 2" of the bone of the right leg and 1" of the fibula of the left leg had been sawn off, followed by great pain. Morphine doses were given but the drug could not always suppress the pain completely. The morphine was increased

to the maximum permissible limit and he wandered in delirium. The hours had no meaning and nightmares came even in stupor. There seemed no escape from the pain. It took a week for it to subside.

* * *

The physical battle had almost ended. The mental battle was about to start. The thought of a ground job whilst his colleagues flew troubled him. He also grimaced at the thought that he would be dependent on others. Once, when his nurse, Dorothy Brace, told him that a fellow pilot had died in a crash and Bader was darned lucky to be alive, he remonstrated, "*He's* the lucky one. He's dead. I'd rather be killed outright than be left like this." Brace observed his depression setting in and was always supportive with her warmth and empathy. She cheered, encouraged and soothed him and the two were so strongly connected that they were virtually fighting the battle together. Years later, Bader declared that Dorothy Brace saved his life.

Bader never turned back upon himself and accepted the consequence of his action. When he was discharged from the hospital, most of the nurses — some in tears — came to bid him farewell. The nurses were more moved than him. It was four months since he was admitted. He was now moved to an RAF hospital.

Bader had only a pair of stumps and crutches to support him during his stay at the RAF hospital and yet he managed to move about and amazingly, even taught himself to drive, never mind the fact that he was violating Air Force and civilian regulations. After a while, Bader was sent to Dessoutter Brothers, who were specialist artificial limb makers. Dessoutter took his measurements and asked him to come after two weeks.

On his return, his two artificial legs were ready. Using them to walk was arduous and painful. His first session in walking was dreadful as he was largely immobile. There were times when he felt a kind of paralysis. There were no toe, ankle or calf muscles to give the thrust for taking a step. The specialist, Dessoutter was convinced that Bader would never be able to walk without a stick, but Bader challenged that, as he was unwilling to accept that he was a cripple. He was told that it would take him six months to learn to walk with the artificial legs. Bader retorted, "Don't be silly. There's a girl I want to see in a couple of days (his first date with his future wife, Thelma) and I want to be walking on these legs again." He was reminded that he would need a stick as a prop and to thrust himself forward, to which he countered, "Not me!" Again he tried to walk, but stumbled. Finally, he did manage to take his first three unaided steps, grabbing a parallel bar just before tumbling down. And then tongue in cheek, he said to Dessoutter, "There you are. You can keep your damn' sticks now."

Dessoutter exclaimed, "I have never even seen a chap with *one* leg do that before the first time." Bader soon managed to walk across the room without

anybody's assistance, but when he reached the wall he was in a quandary, for he was unable to turn. The same morning he practised for two hours until he was too exhausted to even stand, whilst the right stump was sore and painful. Dessoutter said admiringly, "I honestly think you're incredible. None of us has ever seen anyone like you before."

By his third visit, Bader came to collect his legs for keeps. He had by now taught himself to get up from his chair. Dessoutter was reluctant to give the legs prematurely and then said: "Well, there you are. They're all yours. It's a bit soon to let you have them really, but I suppose you'll only start complaining if you don't take them."

He grinned, "Shall I wrap them for you?"

"Not on your life," Bader replied, "I'm walking out on 'em."

"Now how about a stick?" Dessoutter suggested.

"Never," he replied crisply.

After attaching and strapping the artificial legs, he wore his trousers over them and then wore his shirt, jacket and tie to see how he looked in the mirror. He seemed quite normal. It was a wonderful moment, a kind of renaissance. After seven months, he was back on his feet and his heart soared as he felt whole again. As he drove off he discovered to his consternation that he could not cross his legs!

* * *

When he reached the Air Force station he climbed a flight of stairs to reach his ward. The effort was so Herculean that he could hardly stand. He was sapped of energy and his body hurt all over. At night, he detached his legs but his visits to the toilet were irritating, as re-strapping his legs was cumbersome. He was inventive enough to devise a way to reach the bathroom by swinging himself along the floor using his hands and bottom. The next day, he tried walking on the grass, but the task was so difficult that he fell at least twenty times. He stubbornly refused to take anyone's help. He would repeatedly stumble on the grass, flapping his arms like a tight-rope walker, to keep his balance. He would carry on till his legs hurt and he shivered out of fatigue. The right stump was now sore. For the next two days he fumbled around, falling repeatedly, but doggedly rebuffing any help extended. Falling, and getting up unaided, was part of the same package. Since his school days on the parallel bars and the games of rugby he had no fear of falling. Had he worried about falling, he would certainly have been beaten.

He would persevere for hours when other men would have given up to rest awhile or given up in despair. The abrasion on the stumps was a constant ordeal but he pushed himself to the limit until his clothes were soaking with sweat. Sadly, the stump socks too got wet and the skin started rubbing off in several spots painfully. Initially, his colleagues would tease him for his efforts, but then they realised that

they were watching a person battling to do something that had never been done successfully before, with only his guts to help him and a crippled life ahead if he failed. It was something that could not be laughed off. The Mother has spoken about how effort creates vibrations that enable you to enter into relation with universal vibrations and it is this that gives joy. Concentration and an intensity of the will to achieve an objective are the origin of joy.

He had set his mind to learn how to walk and he refused to accept that it was impossible. The more he pushed himself to walk, the more it hurt; but that did not deter him. He would not accept defeat. His nature would not allow him to accept a favour from anyone; and in order to maintain his strong independent streak, it was indispensable that he learn how to walk unassisted. There were weeks of gruelling practice but acquiring balance and natural movement seemed impossible, and he still kept falling. The ache too was bothersome. The artificial legs were very awkward, bringing growing despair and distress as he woke from the dreams and expectations of normality and cricket. Psychologically, it was the worst time since the accident.

To his surprise, he soon discovered that swimming without legs was something quite novel. It was exhausting as he now did not have the use of his legs to kick himself forward, but on the other hand, it was easier to keep afloat. He felt marvellous being in the water.

Another splendid incident occurred when he was permitted to fly an Avro 504. He met the Under Secretary of State for Air, Sir Philip Sassoon. "You know, sir, I'm quite sure I could fly perfectly well now. It'd be easier than driving a car — not so much footwork." Sassoon arranged an aircraft for him to fly.

Next morning he was thrilled just to be putting on overalls, helmet and goggles again. He climbed into the two-seater aircraft along with his colleague, Ross. Ross enquired, "Shall I start her up from here, Douglas?"

"No," he said, "just turn on your switches and take your hands off. Leave everything alone. I'll do it."

He started the engines and taxied down the runway. He pressed the throttle to gather speed and took off into the air. At that instant a state of bliss enveloped him and he felt utterly at home. He cruised over the countryside and after a while, returned to land the aircraft gently. That afternoon when Sassoon enquired how he got on, he said, "Absolutely fine, sir. Honestly, no different at all to flying with my old legs. I've got to have a medical board, sir, to see if I can fly again. I was rather hoping you might let them know in advance that I actually have flown again and that it's perfectly simple with these legs."

Sassoon managed to get him assessed by the medical board. The medical board called him to adjudicate on his fitness as a pilot. A Wing Commander of the board told him, "I've just been reading what the Central Flying School says about you. They say you can fly pretty well. Unfortunately we can't pass you fit for flying because there's nothing in the King's Regulations which covers your case."

This news was a bolt from the blue. After the air crash, this was the biggest blow in his life — for, to be a dashing fighter pilot was his only aspiration.

* * *

With his dream of becoming a fighter pilot dashed to the ground, he was now posted to Duxford, a fighter station just north of London. He was gloomy, aware that he could never stay in the RAF doing a ground job. He got a break when he became friendly with one of the pilots who allowed Bader to fly with him on his two-seater aircraft. He also did a tarmac landing (tarmac landings consisted of coming in so slowly and with such fine judgment that the aircraft touched down on the short tarmac and stopped before running on to the grass. They were not officially approved and therefore popular). Sadly, Bader was caught by a senior officer, flying on the sly and this put an end to his aerial adventures.

A few weeks later, Bader was informed that due to the results of the final medical board he could no longer be employed in the RAF. It was distressing news, as Bader dearly loved the RAF. After some anxious weeks of unemployment, he obtained a job in the aviation section of the Asiatic Petroleum Co. He celebrated by promptly proposing to Thelma.

* * *

Thereafter Bader had yet another accident but this time it was his car going at 100 mph that hit a lorry. He lost his door and back wheels in the process. It was a providential escape. Following the accident, Bader secretly married Thelma even though he wasn't very solvent. She never stopped being amazed by Bader's energy and will power. She encouraged and soothed him and knew how to cope with Bader's rebellion against the circumstances. She was utterly unselfish.

Thanks to a friend, Bader was introduced to golf. It was a promising sport that kept him occupied. On the first day, he fell more than forty times but still kept at it. On the second day, he fared slightly better, falling only about twenty times, though he managed to hit the ball on several occasions. Over the days, he made a steady progress in his golf, never mind how bruised and aching the stumps were. It was good exercise and the muscles in the stumps and the arms were building. He developed into a fine golfer. Golf allowed him to channel his energies and gave him a purpose in life, an outlet from his drab professional responsibilities which offered no challenges. Astonishingly, Bader could play 36 holes a day and even if his stumps were chafed and hurting, he never backed away unless his partner made the first suggestion. Bader also learnt to play tennis but it was golf that was his true love. Henry Longhurst, former captain at Cambridge, a connoisseur and a golf journalist, was thoroughly impressed with Bader's golfing ability.

One day in 1935, Bader read in the newspaper that the RAF was to be expanded. A speech by Mr. Baldwin announced that Britain's frontier was on the Rhine and that Britain must rearm to keep pace with Germany. A bigger Air Force meant they would need more pilots! He wrote to the RAF about rejoining but the answer was in the negative.

Bader formalised his wedding to Thelma by remarrying her. (They had married secretly four years earlier.) During the marriage rehearsal, Bader knelt and tipped over and fell smack on his face, much to the delight of his friends and guests. Unfortunately his wooden legs were not flexible enough for him to kneel. The *Daily Mirror* showed a photograph of the couple at the wedding and captioned it: "This Man has Courage."

Bader's enthusiasm and love of flying never waned. Hitler had never meant much to him until Munich. While time drifted along and Hitler's antics were coming into prominence, Bader realised that there was going to be a war with Germany. He wrote to the Air Ministry asking if he could be allowed to fly again so as to be ready when war broke out. The Air Ministry replied that his legs made him a permanent risk and instead, inquired if he would accept an administrative post in the RAF. His reply was in the negative. In April 1939 when Hitler had invaded Czechoslovakia Bader persevered in his attempt to be re-inducted as a pilot, and to his delight, the Air Ministry wrote to him stating that if war broke out they would be happy to use him as a pilot, provided he was declared fit by the doctors. Out of a great yearning to fly and to fight for his country, he was praying that hostilities would start.

When Hitler invaded Poland and Chamberlain declared war with Germany, Bader immediately wrote to the Air Ministry again, offering his services as a fighter pilot. In October 1939 he was called by the selection board of the Air Ministry where he met Air Vice-Marshal Halahan, his old Commandant at Cranwell. Bader shocked him by stating that he was looking for a flying job and had no intention of doing any kind of ground duty.

Halahan was moved by Bader's zest and gave him a note to be handed to the medical board. It said, "I have known this officer since he was a cadet at Cranwell under my command. He's the type we want. If he is fit, apart from his legs, I suggest you give him A.1.B (full flying category) and leave it to the Central Flying School to assess his flying capabilities!"

The medical board relented and gave him an A.1.B. It was a miraculous turn of events as seven years ago the King's Regulations had prevented him from flying, permanently. It was an unforgettable defining moment of his life, akin to a blind man being able to see again. His face glowed and he lighted up within as destiny took flight. Such was his euphoria that he was oblivious and indifferent to the oncoming war.

On 18th October 1939, he was asked to report for his flying test. He was taken on a trainer aircraft with an instructor and when he was given an opportunity to fly, it was a moment to savour. Seven years of absence had not diminished his flying skills one bit.

Such were his courage, determination and skill as a pilot that at the end of November 1939 he was informed that the RAF would take him back, not on the Volunteer Reserve, but as a regular officer in the RAF, protecting his previous rank and seniority. This was an unprecedented decision in the annals of RAF history (overriding the King's Regulations) that a severely disabled person was being inducted and that in the most elite of positions. It was a story in itself. But there was more to come.

On 27th November 1939, he flew an aircraft solo — almost eight years after his crash — and could not resist doing all the aerobatics, like rolls, loops etc and that too at forbidden low heights. Soon Wg. Cdr. Pringle, Chief Flying Instructor, called Rupert Leigh and said, “Leigh, I have just landed. On my way down I passed a Tutor upside down at a height of 600 feet.” Leigh became stiff with angst. The cold voice continued, “I *know* who it was. Be good enough to ask him not to break *all* the flying regulations straightaway.”

Bader flew solo several times. His only concern was being forced to bale out. Landing by parachute is like jumping off a 12-foot wall, a force too strong for his artificial legs to bear. However he did not allow this to preoccupy him. There was flying everyday and comradeship and banter in the mess every evening. Despite liquor flowing freely at these mess parties, he remained the rare non-drinking officer. He said, “If I can't be cheerful without a drink, I'm not much good.” There was a strong liquor culture in the RAF but he was a teetotaler for he wanted to be fully fit. Among his idiosyncrasies was the fact that he liked to smoke a pipe, but he did not inhale in order not to congest his lungs.

Thelma came to meet him for a week and had never found him happier.

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKAR

Sources

Reach for the Sky by Paul Brickhill, Cassell, London, 2000.

Websites — RAF, BBC and others.

It is indeed true that when one conquers a difficulty or goes forward, it creates a right current in the atmosphere. .

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1726)

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

(Continued from the issue of January 2010)

FOR the Kumartuli gathering on 11th July 1909, Sri Aurobindo consented only to attend the meeting, but at the request of the chairman he rose to speak amid loud cheers. He was reluctant to speak as he had already delivered a good many speeches and had exhausted what he had to say and also he did not like to repeat all over again the same things. He now wanted to see what his countrymen did with his suggestions. Another reason was that he was averse to speaking in English to a Bengali audience.

He said that a good many people were disappointed with his activities after he came out of jail. His first friend at Hare Street (the office of *The Englishman*, a newspaper — the mouthpiece of the Government — was located on Hare Street) was very much disappointed as he had promised to devote himself to literature and religion but instead of that he had gone to Jhalakati and had spoken on Swadeshi and boycott to a huge gathering. Sri Aurobindo pointed out that that was exactly what he was doing — writing on Swaraj and Swadeshi was his literature and speaking on Swadeshi and Swaraj which were his religion.

His second friend — the police were also disappointed. They complained that he was opening his mouth too often and his Press interview in the Government Hotel at Alipore (the Jail) angered the authorities and he had been warned that it might lead to trouble. Even at Jhalakati the police intimidated the people, attempting to prevent them from arranging a meeting and threatened to stop the Conference. But the Conference did take place and the meeting was attended by people with enthusiasm. Swadeshi had become the weapon for deportation. And if he agreed to speak in Kumartuli it was to show that intimidation made him more obstinate to speak. He said that he had an unfortunate temper and it was natural he did not like to be intimidated.

Intimidation only made him persist in doing his duty more obstinately, and if he spoke today, it was partly because of that friendly suggestion.

(CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 102)

Another friend from Madras [*The Indian Patriot*] asked him to give up politics and become a Sanyasin.

One reason for suggesting inactivity to him was that he was imperilling his safety. That was a very singular reason to put before a public man for shirking his duty.

(*ibid.*)

Also this Madras friend was happy with the reforms initiated by the Government. Hence he was annoyed at Sri Aurobindo's opposition to it. But he had studied the reforms deeply. They were encased beautifully but the gift itself was shoddy.

Those who are led away by the reforms would not only diminish the powers of this country but lead others into the wrong path.

(*ibid.*, p. 103)

He was surprised by Mr. Gokhale's speech delivered at Poona. Mr. Gokhale denounced Swaraj and said that those who professed passive resistance were liars. He also justified the repressive actions of the Government against these people. But if they shirked because of repression then

. . . it would be true that they had adopted an ideal that they could not reach and proclaimed means of reaching it in which they did not believe, because they were anxious to save their skin.

(*ibid.*)

Amid cheers and laughter he proclaimed that

He had found that with the ideal of Swaraj to uphold and the *mantra* of "Bande Mataram" in the heart, there was nothing so very terrible in jail or deportation. That was the first thing he would like to impress on them as the result of his experience. Imprisonment in a righteous cause was not so terrible as it seemed, suffering was not so difficult to bear as our anticipations made it out. The prize to which they aspired was the greatest to which a nation could aspire and if a price was asked of them, they ought not to shrink from paying it.

(*ibid.*, pp. 103-04)

Sri Aurobindo was not afraid of imprisonment or deportation but was afraid of the pat on the back and the voice that soothed.

The mixed policy of repression and kindness was the thing he feared most.

(*ibid.*, p. 104)

When men like Ashwini K. Dutta and Krishna K. Mitra were taken away and not restored,

Who could trust such a conciliation?

(*ibid.*, p. 104)

He declared that

So long as the exploitation of the country by foreign trade remained, would they injure their country by giving up or slackening the boycott?

(*ibid.*, p. 105)

He reminded the audience that the 7th of August was the birthday of boycott, when the whole nation rose to defy the Partition and declared the boycott, — it was the birthday of the new spirit in India. The Partition still remained.

It was not much they had to do. Only once more to utter the sacred *mantra* of “Bande Mataram”, once more to declare that India was not lifeless, that Bengal was faithful to the vow she had made.

(*ibid.*, p. 105)

So long as in this country there were a few who had the courage of their faith, so long as there were even a few who were ready to proclaim their faith and live it, there was no fear for the ultimate triumph of the faithful. . . .

On their fidelity to Swadeshi, to boycott, to passive resistance rested the hope of a peaceful and spiritual salvation. On that it depended whether India would give the example unprecedented in history of a revolution worked out by moral force and peaceful pressure.

(*ibid.*, p. 106)

On 18th July Sri Aurobindo presided over a meeting in College Square in Calcutta. There he spoke on the speech delivered by the Lt. Governor in the Bengal Legislative Council. An Englishman had been murdered in London by an Indian. The whole country had denounced that isolated murder but that was not enough for the Lt. Governor. The incident provoked the Governor to say that denouncement was not enough, he wanted full co-operation from the whole community. But his request was saddled with a threat that ‘if no peaceful solution to the problem of terrorism could be found the Government would be obliged to find a remedy that would be neither painless nor peaceful’ in the application of which there would ‘be little room for the discrimination between the innocent and the guilty’.

Sri Aurobindo pointed out:

Now, gentlemen, we are a people who demand self-government. We have a government in which we are not at all associated and over which we have no control. What is the co-operation a government of this kind can really demand from us? It can only demand from us obedience to the law, co-operation in

keeping the law and observing peace and order. What further co-operation can they expect from us?

(*ibid.*, p. 123)

Sri Aurobindo pointed out that the Lt. Governor approved of Mr. Gokhale's speech in Poona.

In that speech Mr. Gokhale declared that the ideal of independence was an ideal which no sane man could hold. He said that it was impossible to achieve independence by peaceful means and the people who advocate the peaceful methods of passive resistance are men who, out of cowardice, do not speak out the thought that is in their heart. . . . He has told the ardent hearts which cherish this ideal of independence and are determined to strive towards it that their ideal can only be achieved by violent means. If any doctrine can be dangerous, if any teacher can be said to have uttered words dangerous to the peace of the country, it is Mr. Gokhale himself. . . .

We have not said to our young men, "when you are repressed, retaliate;" we have said, "suffer." Now we are told that by doing so we are encouragers of sedition and anarchism. We have been told by Anglo-Indian papers that by speaking in Beadon Square and other places on patriotism and the duty of suffering we encourage sedition. We are told that in preaching passive resistance we are encouraging the people to violate law and order and are fostering violence and rebellion. The contrary is the truth. . . .

But the L.-G. says that measures will be passed which will observe no nice discrimination between the innocent and the guilty. . . . If the threat is carried out, who will be the gainers? . . . Not the Government, neither Mr. Gokhale and his school of passive co-operation. It is the very terrorists, the very anarchists, whom you wish to put down, who will gain by it.

(*ibid.*, pp. 123-25)

The means of passive resistance, boycott, Swadeshi are peaceful means and if the Government and Mr. Gokhale want these to be abandoned and join Mr. Gokhale's group of passive co-operation that will not eradicate the aspiration for freedom from British rule. If the people's hope to gain freedom by peaceful means is removed they will take to violent means to achieve their objectives.

If it wants co-operation it cannot get the co-operation which is simply another name for passive obedience. That is the doctrine which is being taught today, the doctrine of the divine right of officials and the obligation on the people of passive obedience. That is a doctrine which no modern nation can accept. No modern nation can accept the extinction of its legitimate and natural hopes.

Co-operation can only be given if the Government which is now alien becomes our own, if the people have a share in it, not merely in name, not merely by the right of talk in the legislative council, not merely by apparent concessions, but by getting some measure of control in the matter of legislation, in the expenditure of the taxes they are called on to pay for the maintenance of the administration, if, in short, they can be given some starting-point from which in future the Government of the country can be developed into a Government of the people. That is the only condition upon which the co-operation, of which we hear so much nowadays, can be given. Without it co-operation is a satire, it is a parody. It is the co-operation in which one side acts and the other side merely says “yes” which is demanded of us. We cannot give our sanction to such co-operation. . . . We cannot sacrifice our country. We cannot give up the ideal that is dear to our heart. We cannot sacrifice our Mother.

(*ibid.*, p. 126)

Sri Aurobindo spoke to a small gathering at his residence on 15th August 1909 on the occasion of his 37th birth anniversary. He spoke of his childhood when he was conscious of a strong impulse in him which he could not make out.

. . . the impulse is surging forth in great force, and my set purpose and devotion are becoming more confirmed with the trials and oppressions to which I am subjected. When some divine power by the grace of God manifests itself in a human being any efforts to develop it give a new force to the national life. You will have to sacrifice yourself at the feet of your Mother. You should, therefore, devote yourself with firm faith and whole heart to her service. Service to our motherland is our highest duty at this moment. This must be our duty in this iron age. It is now the time for us to conserve our energy. Do not be impatient, do not despair. Do not lose faith. The present fatigue and inactivity are natural; you will find instances of them in the history of every nation. Everyone must store up energy. Be prepared with fresh hope and vigour for the worship of the Mother. Divine power has infused this nation with a new power. This power will exalt the nation one day.

(*ibid.*, p. 178)

On 10th October 1909 he spoke again in College Square against the partition of Bengal which had come into effect on 16 October 1905. Since then this day was being observed as a day of mourning. On 7th August 1905 the proposal to partition Bengal was proclaimed and the people rose in thousands to boycott foreign goods to protest against the partition and Sri Aurobindo too came from Baroda to lead the protest.

The *Times of India* (Bombay) reported that on 10th October 1909 Sri Aurobindo rose to speak amid loud cheers and cries of “Bande Mataram”:

. . . The 16th October had become a memorable day, not only in the history of India, but in that of the world. The 7th of August was the day of the awakening of the nation and the 16th October was the day when that awakened nation publicly declared its individuality and indestructible vitality.

. . .

He explained the true meaning of the Swadeshi and boycott movements and went on to say that they should have a separate existence. They had a past and a future and should assert their individuality. . . . The Partition Day should also be associated with national determination to revive the commerce and industry of the country and to regain that prosperity which once prevailed in India. Bengal must remain united.

. . .

Holding up before the audience a piece of Manchester cloth, stamped with the words “Bande Mataram”, he exclaimed that the great cause was suffering on account of certain unprincipled men who were trying to assail the Swadeshi movement from all sides. . . . The more the difficulties in the way, he declared, the stronger would the movement be. He concluded his address by asking his countrymen to observe the 16th of October with due mourning.

(*ibid.*, pp. 274-75)

It was on 13th October 1909 that Sri Aurobindo spoke in Bhawanipur along with other speakers.

We meet here preliminary to the holding of the anniversary of the Partition. Babu Lalit Mohan Das has told you the significance of that day. Let me add this, that the 16th October has become one of the chief landmarks of our year, and not only the chief landmark of our year but the landmark of the progress of our movement — a movement of the progress of Swadeshi and boycott which we undertook in the year when the Partition was effected. . . . Every kind of obstruction is being thrown in our way. You know very well what efforts have been made to mar the attendance at the meeting. It is supposed that the meeting is mainly composed of students, a delusion which the authorities cannot get rid of and therefore strenuous efforts are made to prevent students of our colleges from joining any political meeting and pressure is brought to bear upon the authorities of the colleges to dismiss from their employment any professor who joins in the political life of his country.

(*ibid.*, p. 276)

One after another the Samitis were being forced to close down — the Samitis which had the least to do with politics.

The one message we can give to you, under such circumstances, is the message to hold firm. If you cannot progress see that you have not receded. Hold firm to the Swadeshi, hold firm to your refusal to the recognition of Partition, hold firm to the national movement which is uplifting India.

...

I trust that even with all these obstacles and even in spite of various rumours we hear on this 16th of October, the landmark of our progress, we will show that we have not receded one step but progressed. Even if it is not so, let us remember the enormous difficulties that we have to face. Let us remember the power that led us on. Whatever happens let us have faith and courage — faith that looks beyond all momentary obstacles and reverses and sees the goal that God has set before us, and the courage that never flinches for a moment but moves forward calmly, wisely, but strongly and irresistibly to that goal.

(*ibid.*, pp. 277-78)

This speech was delivered on 16th October 1909, at Beadon Square, to commemorate the 4th anniversary of the effectuation of the Partition of Bengal. This day was observed as *Raksha Bandhan* signifying the national bond. Here Sri Aurobindo was greeted with prolonged shouts of “Bande Mataram” and the rush for *Raksha Bandhan* ensued. Sri Aurobindo spoke a few words in Bengali. He was unwilling to speak in a foreign tongue on such a sacred occasion as he was not fluent in his mother tongue.

But he would only say one thing, viz., that the *rakhi bandhan* was not only a bond of thread but it was the semblance of another tie. It was the sign of uniting the heart of millions of people of United Bengal. The *rakhi* might be removed in a day or two but that sacred bond of hearts would remain firm through all ages. There was no power on earth which could untie that sacred knot — it was a national bond. They had taken oath. They should stick to it, God helping.

(*ibid.*, p. 279)

Sri Aurobindo delivered twelve speeches in four and a half months after his release from prison. His earliest speech in a Baroda College social gathering on 22 July 1899 was non-political and scholarly. After his involvement in the agitation against the Partition of Bengal and joining the National College as principal in 1906, he liberally expressed his views on the political situation of India and expressed his love for the Motherland:

Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice.

(*CWSA*, Vol. 7, p. 657)

After meeting Lele and realising the silent, spaceless and timeless Brahman in January 1908 his speeches though on the present situation in the country, express the commitment to carry out God's command. But after the release from jail there was a marked change in his outlook. Though the speeches dealt with the current political situation and he firmly and boldly spoke against the British policy, along with his reliance on the outer movement of Swadeshi, boycott and non-co-operation there was greater reliance on the spirit within to carry out God's wish that India should be free and that her mission was to lead the world. India should be free not only for herself but for the world.

On 15th August 1909 Sri Aurobindo commemorated his 37th birth anniversary for the last time in Calcutta. 38 years later, India did become a free nation in 1947 on his 75th birth anniversary. His last few speeches delivered in Calcutta were a vehement rejection of the Partition of Bengal. In 1911 the Partition was rescinded. But by that time the seed was already sown deep and lay dormant for a long time, to germinate finally in the Partition of India. When Sri Aurobindo came to know that India would achieve freedom on his birthday he wrote to a devotee

... I am getting a birthday present of a free India on August 15, but complicated by its being presented in two packets as two free Indias: this is a generosity I could have done without, one free India would have been enough for me if offered as an unbroken whole.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 26, pp. 170-71)

He also saw the ruse of the British in giving some concessions to India. Whereas some leaders were satisfied with the offer, he said that such legislation created a division among the communities and in the end the British by their policy of 'divide and rule' would gain. And that is what happened — the communal division increased and the solution the leaders found was to partition the country. In the end the British did divide the country but they could not continue to rule.

Now, a hundred years from 1909, the gloom, the darkness, the helplessness under a foreign rule are gone. India is enjoying the gospel of Liberty and with it freedom of speech, which, sadly, has also become a weapon to malign others, to misrepresent, misinterpret and to spread falsehood and express hatred. Equality is still an aim waiting to be achieved — how to bring it about among the multifarious divided communities; and Fraternity is being misused to plunge the country into anarchism by the newly cropping up associations.

But in spite of all these rampant evils, Sri Aurobindo's Motherland, which for him is not an inert mass of land, mountains, trees and streams but a living spirit —

a Shakti, — is one of the fastest-developing countries in the world. But in this globalisation when the world is beginning to recognise the spirit and power of India, wouldn't it be a tragedy if India were to forget her mission in the world, her spiritual destiny, in her haste to material progress? As Sri Aurobindo wrote,

It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light.

(CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 504)

The need of the hour is:

Unite, be free, be one, be great.

(CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 83)

(Concluded)

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTI

What human will is at present particularly against the divine Will?

You mean from what point of view?

All human will which is against the divine Will is an anti-divine will. That's all. No matter where it manifests, even in you!

There are no party politics in the divine life, you know. (Laughter) There are only states of consciousness.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1954, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 6, p. 457)

LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

(Continued from the issue of January 2010)

2. An Indispensable Icon

WHAT is an icon? The dictionary gives several meanings but all of them are more or less the same. Image, emblem, logo, idol, model . . . I cannot imagine a life bereft of icons or idols or images. The icon is certainly something to hold on to when we get buffeted by intense joy or excruciating sorrow. And an icon can be a civilising influence when we lead a normal, humdrum life with tiny hates, brief frustrations, fleeting affections and passing friendships.

The Indian genius is tuned to icon-culture. From the Indus Valley seals onwards, we have lived with representations to help us understand our religio-spiritual life. The Indus Valley seals are generally understood to be 5,000 years old. Recently, a researcher, Narendra Jha, has identified some of them as representing Indra and the Defeat of Mara. The Vedic culture did not seem to have icons. People adored the fire and the *yajna vedi* became the icon for daily offerings of prayer to the Mystic Fire.

When heroes died, our ancients needed something to remember them by and to inspire others, so they set up hero stones. Then came the temple culture, unparalleled by any other culture in the world — which only goes to prove that man needs something to hold on to, so that his link with the Divine remains undisturbed, even if there are changes in his lifestyle. When the Indian decided to have an icon to hold on to, he just went on to produce an extraordinary opulence. This is why Sri Aurobindo says with great compassion that an integral yogi uses both Personality and Impersonality as “the two wings of his ascension”. Nothing is excluded from the Aurobindonian sadhana:

Therefore the wise have always been unwilling to limit man’s avenues towards God; they would not shut against his entry even the narrowest portal, the lowest and darkest postern, the humblest wicket-gate. Any name, any form, any symbol, any offering has been held to be sufficient if there is the consecration along with it; for the Divine knows himself in the heart of the seeker and accepts the sacrifice.¹

But then, repeatedly, a time comes when choice becomes difficult. *Kasmai devāya havishā vidhema*, the Veda asks. To which God shall we take our offerings?

1. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 82.

The Indian genius simply went back to the Absolute: *Ek, Omkar*. That was fine for the realised souls. But how about the common man who cannot concentrate in meditative silence? There are a million pulls within the home and in the outside world. So the scripture became the icon.

Several decades ago, I was asked to speak on Guru Nanak Dev in a Gurudwara at Vishakhapatnam. How can I forget the maternal devotion with which the priest opened the silk covering of the *Guru Granth Saheb* and proceeded to read from it after saluting it with great fervour? There was someone sitting nearby and fanning the *Granth Saheb* with a *chowrie*. So have I seen Sri Srivatsa Goswami of Brindavan carry the *Srimad Bhagavata* wrapped in silk on his head when bringing it to a meeting to read and explain the verses. It only means that the book now is no more a bound sheaf of printed Whatman paper. It has now become a holy icon, a direct contact with the Guru, with Krishna.

I am not far off the track when I say that my copy of *The Life Divine* became an icon for me. This is mine own, my *ista devatā*, and when I touch it, I touch a sacred string which gets me in contact with the work of a “Master Spirit”. Also with my father who has placed his signature on the opening page: “K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar. 9th Feb. 1952.” Immediately, there is an urgency to just open it, feel the pages, read a passage.

Does Sri Aurobindo ever fail even the casual reader who opens a page at random in this magnificent structure? His words seem to be authoritative but it is the authority of an anxious *acharya*, not that of a switch-wielding headmaster. Am I suffering from a nameless frustration at having seen a bier? Do I feel mentally and physically tired after a visit to the hospital where a dear friend is battling illness with the aid of injections, or has been encased in a strait-jacket (that is what it looks like to me) to avoid disturbing the bone-structure of the spine after a particularly nasty accident? I come home and reach out to my icon, do a brief *namaskar* to it and open the familiar friend. Immediately the sentences wind around me, and gently carry me through patches of grey towards possible flecks of light before I close the book due to some external disturbance crying out for immediate attention.

This then is the necessity and justification of Death, not as a denial of Life, but as a process of Life; death is necessary because eternal change of form is the sole immortality to which the finite living substance can aspire and eternal change of experience the sole infinity to which the finite mind involved in living body can attain.²

Aha, this is the chapter. ‘Death, Desire and Incapacity’. It is always an interesting experience to read Sri Aurobindo by parts. It is true he is building a great, sustained

2. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 206.

and splendid argument in *The Life Divine*. You must read and understand the entire book to go anywhere near Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. But do I wait to know the whole of our *Puranas*, *Agamas* and devotional literature for gazing at a statue of the Flute-player of Brindavan? Do I not simply turn to him, forget even to bring my palms together in salutation and just stand staring at the ease with which he holds the flute, his two hands raised to a height slightly lower than his face? Or wonder at the elegance with which his right foot is in front, poised on its toes, crossing the left foot? Just as each portion of an icon holds my attention because of devotion nurtured in my heart by my culture, *The Life Divine* too arrests me where I open the book and it gives plenty of enrichment.

Quotes from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and the *Rig Veda* have been appended as epigraphs here. The sentences sway like the open hood of a cobra listening to a melodious *nagaswaram* play the *punnagavarali* raga. Our heads do no less as we take in the unambiguous relating of this chapter to the earlier ones as well as the argument yet to unfold. Life is the universal Force. This is the Shakti which is in charge of creation and it continues to create. Sri Aurobindo does not use an array of philosophical terms that have grown heavy with centuries of scholarly discourse. He attunes the language to the modern reader and gets us going with some scientific diction on hand.

The material universe starts from the formal atom surcharged with energy, instinct with the unformed stuff of a subconscious desire, will, intelligence. Out of this Matter apparent Life manifests and it delivers out of itself by means of the living body the Mind it contains imprisoned within it; Mind also has still to deliver out of itself the Supermind concealed in its workings.³

It all sounds so easy, so logical a progression, so much immediately in the future. Such is the power of Sri Aurobindo's style. Then we take a breather and just turn back to have a rough idea of the time it will take for such transformations. We are brought to an abrupt standstill in our mental calculations. So, how much time did it take for Life to emerge out of Matter? Maybe some billions of years? It is a mind-boggling count of Time. But Life that has been released from Matter has journeyed for long in Time (again billions of years?) before the emergence of Mind. If so, it is clear there is some Force that is pushing upward, changing, transforming, renovating the existent cells to attain a greater consciousness.

Looking backwards in Time, focussing our inward eye, we could arrive at some recent happenings like the emergence of man from his animal ancestor, the ape. Even that would mean a count of millions of years, I guess. When helping my daughter with her biology homework a couple of decades ago, I was astonished to

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 200-01.

find that we had an ape-like ancestor who had emerged some millions of years ago! Evolution is no instant coffee, then. How then do I keep for myself an optimistic outlook in the background of this seemingly unmoving Time?

Let us set aside such questions. Meanwhile we can spend our limited time in things that reveal the beauty of man's mind and spirit. That is the best way of de-linking the mind from depression. Sri Aurobindo helps us with another thought-provoking statement to draw our attention to the Force that seems to be constantly at work for our progression up the evolutionary ladder. At the same time he slips in the term, Real-Idea.

Consciousness that is Force is the nature of Being and this conscious Being manifested as a creative Knowledge-Will is the Real-Idea or Supermind.⁴

Our unquiet mind which must needs question everything comes up with an interrogation: What is 'Real-Idea'?

To get an answer we have to move back to the chapter 'The Supermind as Creator'. Like a traditional exponent of Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo is exhaustive when explaining technical terms. A concept like the Supermind cannot be elucidated to us if our intellect cannot be given a lead that can achieve a link to the unknown. Even if a 'vision' is given, it would remain no more than that colourful image. For mankind it would be a dream or a utopia and no more. As far as our intellect is concerned, Supermind has to be linked as a certainty for human experience in the future, and not just as a remote possibility. The first step to gain such a certainty is to seek illuminations from the past, says Sri Aurobindo.

It is the cryptic verses of the Veda that help us here; for they contain, though concealed, the gospel of the divine and immortal Supermind and through the veil some illumining flashes come to us. . . . The Gods, who in their highest secret entity are powers of this Supermind, born of it, seated in it as in their proper home, are in their knowledge "truth-conscious" and in their action possessed of the "seer-will".⁵

Their consciousness-force which is "possessed and guided by a perfect and direct knowledge of the thing to be done and its essence and its law" is in charge of creation. They stand between the One and the manifested Many. They draw from the One, the Satchidananda, this 'Many'. When such limitations are made manifest, then the Mind knows it to be 'such-and-such'. As Sri Aurobindo puts it,

4. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Mind is an instrument of analysis and synthesis, but not of essential knowledge.⁶

When a higher consciousness pours into us, this instrument will have to vacate its space for it to act. But while it is with us, it helps our “obscure consciousness” by pouring its light on our blind instincts, keeps a tab upon our intuitions and visions.

And what of the One? Aye, there is the rub, as any Shakespearian character would snuffle. We agree that it contains a divine concentration of all future possibilities, but how does it release these possibilities? This creation has manifested out of the One and has a form of its own. This manifested creation could disintegrate but not the One. That One is eternal, That Is. Hence the disintegration is not a real disintegration, for the Truth-consciousness

contains and upholds the diffusion and prevents it from being a real disintegration, maintains unity in utmost diversity and stability in utmost mutability, insists on harmony in the appearance of an all-pervading strife and collision, . . .⁷

Our Mind screams: a volcano has erupted! The Kurukshetra war has begun! Abhimanyu has been killed! Trains have collided! Tsunami has struck! But peace returns, somehow, anyhow. Life goes on. For the Supermind is actually at work!

This is the Supermind, the Truth-consciousness, the Real-Idea which knows itself and all that it becomes.⁸

It is with some relief that I read this definition. Why should I give in to bouts of depression and fright at what happens around or what happens to me? After all, this is only my mind’s view. The Real-Idea assures me that all this is happening in my passage towards the higher planes of consciousness. I better understand this all-embracing consciousness which includes the past, the present and the future. Why, even a whiplash injury to the neck or a thorn penetrating deep into my sole is a passing adventure, not to be wailed over, as if I had slipped into a Malbowge of Dante’s Inferno. In this manifested reality there is nothing which is eternal. Everything is in a state of movement, creeping towards something better, higher. These new thoughts are actually not new. They have been within me; only I have chosen the greyer, darker shades and turned away from the rays of light, giving in to some momentary pain, a brief disaster. The Mother had given a *mahāvākya*: “Be conscious!” Let us then be conscious of the light within!

6. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

It [the Supermind] comes out as Idea that is a reality, and it is that reality of the Idea which evolves itself, always by its own power and consciousness of itself, always self-conscious, always self-developing by the will inherent in the Idea, always self-realising by the knowledge ingrained in its every impulsion. This is the truth of all creation, of all evolution.⁹

To get into the sustained argument of *The Life Divine* step-by-step as a student of philosophy is not possible for most of us. So many external intrusions break our concentration. From within too, there is a rebellion. After all, the mind that is trying to comprehend is just an instrument and it slows down now and then. But the book gives us what we want — with great love — even if we approach it as an icon, with reverence. That too is a valid path for us. If the understanding from Real-Idea is one of constant movement (and not dissolution), we must take up the call *Charaiveti!* Get on with life and have the Supreme as our goal!

Perhaps that is the reason why Sri Aurobindo has fixed at the beginning of each chapter in *The Life Divine* many epigraphs from our sacred books. These brief quotes take our mind to new areas for a change, without divorcing us from the work. Seeking a definition for the term ‘Real-Idea’ we had come to the chapter, ‘The Supermind as Creator’. Sri Aurobindo has placed a quote from *Sri Vishnu Purana*, before proceeding with the argument. ‘All things are self-deployings of the Divine Knowledge’:

The Supreme is the image of Knowledge hence he is universal, and is not distinguished by any particular representation. These differentiations such as mountain, ocean and earth are all blossomings from that Supermind (*vijnāna vijrumbhitāni*).¹⁰

By linking the present argument to earlier icons like the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Sri Vishnu Purana*, *The Life Divine* also becomes an icon to help us know the life divine and try to live it. Instead of placing in our hands something utterly new that is a stranger in spiritual terms, Sri Aurobindo makes us see the existing literature in a new light. We need symbols in this life to keep remembering the great and good things of the past as well, and to keep us coming back to the ideals we have set up for ourselves since times immemorial. In a world where news-explosion has far outstripped knowledge-explosion and sensationalism has invaded even spiritual spaces, the Aurobindonians need the sumptuous volume to return to regularly and remind themselves of the struggles of the Master to draw us back to the sunlit path set up by our Vedic rishis.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

10. Aswasa II, canto 12, verse 39.

This is why the volume is an enduring symbol in the Aurobindonian world. As with the other writings of the Master, *The Life Divine* is also linked to all his other works as well with invisible strings of gold.

While the philosophic line of reasoning in the book makes us feel confident that there is nothing intangible or woolly about the thinking which gets structured as an evolution-involution dual-power at work, we are also able to get at poetic projections of the ideas found here. That makes it easier at times to draw close to the argument. For instance, taking a cue from the *Vedas*, *The Life Divine* states that between the Supreme One and our own divided consciousness is the world of creative consciousness:

Between them is this comprehensive and creative consciousness, by its power of pervading and intimately comprehending knowledge the child of that self-awareness by identity which is the poise of the Brahman and by its power of projecting, confronting, apprehending knowledge parent of that awareness by distinction which is the process of the Mind.¹¹

Savitri gives the idea as a vibrant image which helps me draw nearer to the idea of gods engaged in creating a colourful world of infinite variety:

Above him he saw the flaming Hierarchies,
The wings that fold around created Space,
The sun-eyed Guardians and the golden Sphinx
And the tiered planes and the immutable Lords.¹²

Welcome icons all! Surya the supreme Truth, Agni, Varuna, Aryama, Indra: so moves on the divine roll call. Then, there is the Supermind, the Real-Idea, the *vijnānamaya* consciousness: can we have a glimpse of it when it does leap down upon our mind and envelopes it with all-knowledge? Aswapati's yoga has helped him traverse the "realms of the supreme Idea". He is not bound any more by the Past-Present-Future differentiation of Time. The world we see here has certainly blossomed from the Supermind (*vijnāna vijrumbhitam*):

In that high realm where no untruth can come,
Where all are different and all is one,
In the Impersonal's ocean without shore
The Person in the World-Spirit anchored rode,
It thrilled with the mighty marchings of World-Force,

11. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, pp. 133-34.

12. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 300.

Its acts were the comrades of God's infinite peace.
 An adjunct glory and a symbol self,
 The body was delivered to the soul, —
 An immortal point of power, a block of poise
 In a cosmicity's wide formless surge, . . .¹³

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

13. *Ibid.*, p. 301.

. . . advancing Knowledge should base herself on a clear, pure and disciplined intellect. It is necessary, too, that she should correct her errors sometimes by a return to the restraint of sensible fact, the concrete realities of the physical world. The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness — to its heights we can always reach — when we keep our feet firmly on the physical.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 11)

A FRACTAL VISION

[On Pravir Malik's new book, *Connecting Inner Power to Global Change*, published by Response Books, Sage, New Delhi, 2009. 216 pp.]

HERE'S a sincere but informal sort of introduction to a new book, *Connecting Inner Power to Global Change*, by Pravir Malik who has been a teacher at the Ashram School, as well as a very successful business consultant in America.

I like reading books written by friends, especially if my friend happens to be smart as well as wise. I had read Pravir's previous two books on management, and what I liked best about them was the prevailing sense that the higher state of consciousness which would be needed is in fact available; so despite its dauntingly dense writing style I read *Connecting Inner Power to Global Change* through to the end, jotting down now and again the names of people I thought would like to read it — came to 18 by the time I'd finished, and I was so enthusiastic I posted it on 'Facebook'.

Essentially, this book uses the ultra-modern concept of fractals to explain how, on many levels, one's individual efforts can "save the world". For those who may not be familiar with the term, French-American mathematician, Benoit Mandelbrot, has proved to the scientific community's satisfaction that one way of understanding the universe is to see it as a repetition of basic patterns (fractals) at all scales, smaller and larger, like cauliflower, or broccoli. In this book, Pravir poses the essential pattern, the fractal which underlies our existence, as physical—vital—mental. Aurobindonians will recognise this immediately. He then goes on to point out in detail how it appears again and again wherever we look: in the sky: morning—day—night; in the individual: body—emotions—mind; in evolution: plants—animals—humans; in culture: agricultural-age—industrial-age—information-age; in business: factory—employees—management, or raw-materials—production—profit; in thought: pragmatism—hedonism—idealism; in digital economy: brochure-ware—e-commerce—re-conceptualisation; in the energy industry: carbon-based maximising—energy-flow alternative—renewable-energy; in global politics: physical-prowess—cold-war—globalisation; in the exchange rate: gold-standard—balance-of-power—real-time-creativity; in physics: atomic-view—quantum-view—unifying-view; in bio-mimicry: form-and-function—imitation-of-processes—whole-systems-view; in organisational design: silo-mentality—process-view—raison-d'être. If we look around and notice its ubiquity enough to be convinced, then we may notice also that there is an inherent order of the three parts, a *progression* from one to the next, a fractal compulsion to complete the pattern, and that a failure to complete the order, a stagnation or diversion, produces disharmony, discomfort. . .

Very meticulously over several chapters, the author points out other inherent qualities of the three parts of this ubiquitous fractal, and also shows how each part of a fractal contains within it the three fractals. So the physical part of a business, for instance, will have a physical-physical part (the tangible assets), and physical-vital part (the tangible energy such as cash), and physical-mental (intangible assets such as goodwill). The same is true of the vital and mental parts. Every fractal is part of a larger fractal, and contains the smaller fractals. The picture on the cover of the book is very helpful in opening the mind to the stupendous complexity and yet utter simplicity of the idea, and the author has also provided many charts to illustrate the ideas as they apply to business. As one reads, one can experience how coming to know and recognise this pattern is itself an act of participating in the progression in one's own self, strengthening the mental appreciation of our situation, completing the pattern.

There were two places where the book particularly lighted me up: 1. The description of the world economy and its 'stuck'-ness in the vital stage; and 2. The personification of Progress and our possibility of identifying with her, completing the fractal triad in oneself, and in so doing influencing the movement of completion on all levels of fractals.

1. We are presently in the last trenches of the Vital Phase of global economic growth.

The writing style of this book is extremely careful — ideas are introduced slowly and very elaborately, and are always posed politely, introduced with “perhaps” or “may”. This can be a bit ponderous, but sets an appropriate seriousness of mood; new ideas which might be dismissed lightly are given their proper weight. So, I was pleased and excited when the focus turned to global economics, and I began to see the very aspects of it that I find so drastically “off” and threatening, clearly comprehended and explained by this theory. The global economy, in this view, is in its vital phase, about to transition into the mental. The “progress” vaunted popularly is *within* the vital, whereas the progress which is needed is to move into the mental. Within the vital phase we have seen the agricultural-industrial-digital sub-fractals following each other spontaneously, evincing progressively more successful achievement of physical, energetic and purposeful service of the vital aim of freeing flows of energy by maximum expression of all the parts. The excesses which we see today, the exhaustion of the physical basis, the rampages of the irresponsible corporation, the reduction of human values to serve the profit-motive, signify that this phase has reached its completion, and it is time to move on to a mental phase of economy, in which the physical and vital tendencies serve the higher ideals of humanity, not the aggrandisement of business. And how is this to be accomplished? As more and more of the people driving the economy have themselves completed

the physical—vital—mental fractal within their individual beings, hence they can make the appropriate shifts in the business realm. Most of us have experienced in our individual lives the inertia and laziness which impedes personal development, the satisfaction of greeds which does not bring mental peace, and how in order to truly succeed we need to overcome these backward-tending impulses and move toward our ideals. The same has to be done on the level of business and global economy, and will be done only as the individual decision makers are completing their own fractal progressions which then reflect in their policy decisions.

2. Progress as Mother

And here we move into the personification of Progress and Her help in this endeavour. To me, in reading this book, I have felt that it is aimed at an Indian audience. For one thing, the level of intellectuality would be lost on most American businessmen; it would take the Indian mind to enjoy the complexity, and also the sly introduction of traditional concepts in new language. (It's fun finding the *gunas*, or the *ashramas*, or *Boomadevi* popping their impudent heads up in a wry peek-a-boo amidst the dry logic.) The personification of qualities is common to the Hindu mind, as it was to the ancient Greek, and to most non-scientific cultures — myths in fact could be seen as fractals, assuming that metaphor is true and that as it is above so is it below. However, for the sake of globalised secular science and impersonal logic, the author has pointed out the quality of progress as inherent in the sequence of physical—vital—mental. It is recognised as the driver of the process, and when so understood can be called upon to assist in resisting the backward-tending influences of the status quo and wild expansions. Progress, “like a mother”, he says, wants to see her children, at every scale, find their fulfilment in completing the sequence, and is always there to help. The logical materialist part of my mind really appreciates this take on the matter.

And this evolutionary Force, Progress, can be tapped into through Her four qualities: perfection, adventure, knowledge and harmony. We can nurture the uniqueness of our deepest self by attaching to and encouraging any and all of these four qualities in ourselves. When we dare to stand for and live by perfection, adventure, knowledge and harmony, when we see our mental-intuitive questioning and harmonising prevail over the inertia and indulgence of the physical-vital, we are completing the fractal pattern, and freeing our unique self to make decisions which will change policy in all the organisations and systems of which we are part.

For a book written for businessmen by a business consultant, the depth of the description of the misguided and depraved nature of the effect of the physical-vital orientation of business on the global scene is both surprising and welcome, and its lethal power is not understated, despite the faith in fractal pressure which ensures that the inevitable transition into the mental-intuitive will occur — either later or

sooner. The possible times and natures of the transition, whether resisted and painful or welcomed and smooth, are as carefully described as had been the fractal theory and the wake-up calls of ecological disaster and social upheaval. The possible scenarios of what life will be like when we've progressed into a society led by the mental-intuitive fractal are recognisable and inspiring, and it becomes clear that the key to the change is with us and our own efforts to progress with the physical—vital—mental sequence as a guideline.

An encouraging sign of the truth of what is being proposed by this book is that the ideas of evolutionary spirituality, conscious evolution, and integral progress are now widespread among the thinking young worldwide. They know about Sri Aurobindo, they know about Teilhard de Chardin, they have Barbara Marx Hubbard, Andrew Cohen, Ken Wilber teaching them and they are not only connecting the dots, they have their own powerful experiences and sense of evolution within them, driving them. When they write and speak, they are not overawed devotees, but co-creators of the new world foreseen by the older visionaries. There are numerous websites offering downloadable talks, and week- and month-long on-line seminars bring in 15,000+ participants. They can already see the evidence of the new consciousness coming into focus in quantum physics and microbiology, in alternative technologies and renewable energies, in complementary currencies and ecological businesses, in social networking on the Internet and the plethora of grassroots movements . . . *Connecting Inner Power to Global Change* is part of this blossoming, addressing particularly the business community, which is a crucial niche. But this blossoming is occurring, thank goodness, all over the world, fulfilling the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

BHAVANA DEE

To recognise one's weaknesses and false movements and draw back from them is the way towards liberation.

Not to judge anyone but oneself until one can see things from a calm mind and a calm vital is an excellent rule. Also, do not allow your mind to form hasty impressions on the strength of some outward appearance, nor your vital to act upon them.

There is a place in the inner being where one can always remain calm and from there look with poise and judgment on the perturbations of the surface consciousness and act upon it to change it. If you can learn to live in that calm of the inner being, you will have found your stable basis.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1684)