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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## SYMBOL MOON

Once again thou hast climbed, O moon, like a white fire on the glimmering edge,  
Floating up, floating up from the haunted verge of a foam-tremulous sea.  
Mystic-horned here crossing the grey-hued listless nights and days,  
Spirit-silver craft from the ports of eternity.

Overhead with thy plunging and swaying prow thou fleetest, O ship of the gods,  
Glorifying the clouds with thy halo, but our hearts with a rose-red rapture  
shed from the secret breasts of love;  
Almost thou seemest the very bliss that floats in opaline air over heaven's golden  
roads,  
Embodied here to capture our human lives like a nectar face of light in the  
doubtful blue above.

Dumbly blithe, shuddering, the air is filled from thy cup of pale mysterious wine:  
Gleam quivers to longing gleam; and the faery torches lit for Night's mysteries  
are set in her niches stark and deep;  
The unconscious gulfs stir and are vaguely thrilled, while their unheard voices cry to  
the Wonder-light new-seen  
Till descending its ray shall unlock with a wizard rod of fire the dumb recesses  
of sleep.

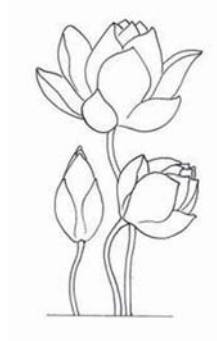
Bright and alone in a white-foam-glinted delicate dim-blue ocean of sky,  
Ever thou runst and thou floatest as a magic drifting bowl  
Flung by the hand of a drunken god in the river of Time goes tossing by,  
O icon and chalice of spiritual light whose spots are like Nature's shadow  
stains on a white and immaculate soul.

How like one frail and haunted thou com'st, O white moon, at my lonely call from  
thy deep sky-covert heights,  
A voyager carrying through the myriad-isled archipelago of the spear-pointed  
questioning stars  
The circle of the occult argent Yes of the Invisible to the dim query of the yearning  
witness lights  
That burn in the dense vault of Matter's waking mind — innumerable,  
solitary and sparse.

A disk of a greater Ray that shall come, a white-fire rapture and girdling rose of love,  
Timelessly thou driftest, O soundless silver boat that set out from the far  
Unknown,  
Moon-crystal of silver or gold of some spirit joy spun by Time in his dense aeonic  
groove,  
A messenger and bearer of an unembodied beauty and unseized bliss  
advancing over our life's wan sea — significant, bright and alone.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 631-32)



# THE KARMA YOGIN

## A Commentary on the Isha Upanishad

*(Continued from the issue of January 2011)*

### Karmayoga; the Ideal

#### Chapter IV

##### VIII. Matariswan and the Waters.

WE are now in a position to consider what may [be] the precise meaning of the Upanishad when it says that in It Matariswan ordereth the waters. Shankara takes *apah* in a somewhat unusual and peculiar sense and interprets, “Air orders or arranges actions”; in other words, all the activity in the Cosmos is dependent upon the aerial or gaseous element in matter which enters into and supports all objects and, as Prana, differentiates and determines their proper functions. Prana, as we have seen, is the great vital energy breathing and circulating through all existence whose activity is the principal instrument of Will in the evolution of the Universe and whose mediation is necessary for all the operations of mind and body in gross matter. In psychic life also Prana is inherent in mind and supports those activities of subtle matter which are necessary for psychic existence. The intimate connection between Prana and vital activity may be best illustrated in its most obvious and fundamental function in the living organism, the regulation of breathing. So important is this function that Breath and Prana are generally identified; the usual signification of the word Prana is, indeed, breath and the five differentiated vital energies supporting the human frame are called the five breaths. So important is it, that even the searching analysis of modern science has not been able to get behind it, and it is held as an incontrovertible fact that the maintenance of respiration is necessary to the maintenance of life. In reality, this is not so. Ordinarily, of course, the regular inhalation of oxygen into the system and exhalation of corrupted breath out of it, is so necessary to the body that an abrupt interruption of the process, if continued for two minutes will result in death by suffocation. But this is merely due to a persistent vital habit of the body. It needs only a careful training in the regulation of the breath to master this habit and make respiration subservient to the will. Anyone who has for a long time practised this art of breath-regulation or Pranayam can suspend inhalation and exhalation for many minutes and some not only for minutes but for hours together without injury to the system or the suspension of bodily life; for internal respiration

and the continuance of the vital activities within the body still maintain the functions necessary to life. Even the internal respiration may be stopped and the vital activities entirely suspended without subjecting the body to the process of death and disintegration. The body may be kept intact for days, months and years while all the functions of breath and vitality are suspended, until the Will in its psychical sheaths chooses to resume its interrupted communications with the world of gross matter and recommence physical life at the precise point at which it was discontinued. And this is possible because Prana, the vital energy, instead of being allowed to circulate through the system under the necessary conditions of organic physical activity, can be gathered up into the mind-organ and from there in its simple undifferentiated form support and hold together the physical case.

But if respiration is not necessary to the maintenance of life, it certainly is necessary to the maintenance of activity. The first condition of Pranayam is the suspension of conscious physical activity and the perfect stillness of the body, which is the primary object of the various *asans* or rigidly set positions of the body assumed by the Yogin as a necessary preliminary in the practice of his science. In the first stages of Yoga the sub-conscious activity of the body due to the life of the cells, continues; in the later stages when internal respiration and vital activities are suspended, even this ceases, and the life of the body becomes like that of the stone or any other inert object. It is held together and exists by the presence of Prana in its primary state, the only connection of Will with the physical frame being the will to subsist physically. This is the first outstanding fact of Yoga which proves that Prana is the basis of all physical activity; the partial or complete quiescence of Prana brings with it the partial or complete quiescence of physical activity, the resumption of its functions by Prana is inevitably attended by the resumption of physical activity. The second outstanding fact is the peculiar effect of Pranayam and Yoga on mental activity. The first condition of Yogic exercises is, as has been said, the stillness of the body, which implies the suspension of the five *indriyas* or potencies of action, grasp, locomotion, utterance, emission and physical ecstasy. It is a significant fact that the habit of suspending these *indriyas* is attended by an extraordinary activity of the five *indriyas* of knowledge, sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, and an immense heightening of mental power and energy. In its higher stages this increase of power intensifies into clairvoyance, clairaudience, the power of reading other minds and knowing actions distant in space and time, conscious telepathy and other psychical powers. The reason for this development is to be found in the habit of gathering Prana or vitality into the mind-organ. Ordinarily the psychical life is overlaid and hampered by the physical life, the activity of Prana in the physical body. As soon as this activity becomes even partially quiescent, the gross physical obstruction of Anna and Prana is rarefied and mind becomes more self-luminous, shining out through the clouds that concealed it; vital energy is not only placed mainly at the service of the mind as in the concentration of the poet and the thinker, but is so

much subtilised by the effect of Pranayam that the mind can operate far more vigorously and rapidly than in ordinary conditions. For mind operates freely and naturally in subtle matter only and the subtler the matter, the freer the workings of the mind. At an intenser stage of Yogic exercise all the vital functions are stilled and Prana entirely withdrawn from bodily functions into mind which can then retire into the subtle world and operate with perfect freedom and detachment from physical matter. Here again we see that just as Prana, differentiated and working physically, was the basis of all physical activity, so Prana, intermediate and working psychophysically, is at the basis of all mental activity, and Prana, pure and working psychically is at the basis of all psychical activity.

The third outstanding fact of Yoga is that while in its earlier processes it stimulates mental activity, in its later stages it overpasses mental activity. At first the mind drawn inward from active reactions to external impacts, is able to perfect its passive reactions or powers of reception and its internal reactions or powers of retention and combination. Next it is drawn inward from external phenomena altogether and becomes aware of the internal processes and finally succeeds in concentrating entirely within itself. This is followed by the entire quieting of the subtle or psychical *indriyas* or sense-potencies followed by the entire quiescence of the mind itself. The reception of psychical impacts and the vibrations of subtle thought-matter are suspended; mind concentrates on a single thought and finally thought itself is surmounted and the Supra-Intelligence is potent, free and active. It is at this stage that Yoga develops powers which are so unlimited as to appear like omnipotence. The true Yogin, however, does not linger in this stage which is still within the confines of psychical existence, but withdraws the Will beyond Supra-Intelligence entirely into itself. The moment the Will passes out of subtle matter, activity ceases. Will has then three courses open to it; either to realize itself as the eternal Sakshi or witness and behold the vision of the Universe as a phenomenon within itself which it *sees but does not enact*; or to disappear into the Sunya Brahman, Supreme Nothingness, the great Void of unconscious mere-existence with which the Parabrahman is veiled; or to return into the Self and, liberated from even the vision of phenomena, exist in its own infinity of pure consciousness and supreme bliss. If we follow Prana through this process of Yogic liberation, we shall find that Prana ends where activity ceases. For Prana is a material entity arising out of the aerial state of subtle matter and as soon as that state is overpassed, Prana is impossible. Throughout there is this close identification of Prana with activity. It may well be said, therefore, that Matariswan is that which arranges actions.

Matariswan is the philosophical expression for Vayu, the aerial principle. It means that which moves in the mother or matrix and the word implies the three main characteristics of the aerial element. It is evolved directly out of ether, the common matrix, which is therefore its own mother and ultimately the mother of all elements, forces, substances, objects; its predominant characteristic is motion, and

this characteristic of motion operates in the matrix, ether. Moving in ether, developing, combining, it creates the substances out of which sun and nebula and planet are made; it evolves fire and water and atmosphere, earth, stone and metal, plant, fish, bird and beast. Moving in ether, acting and functioning through its energy Prana, it determines the nature, motions, powers, activities of all those infinite forms which it has created. By the combinations & operations of this aerial element the sun is built up, fire is struck forth, clouds are formed, a molten globe cools and solidifies into earth. By the energy of the aerial element the sun gives light and heat, fire burns, clouds give rain, earth revolves. Not only all animate, but all inanimate existence owes its life and various activity to Matariswan and its energy Prana.

But it owes not only its life and activity, but the very materials out of which it is made. Here lies the insufficiency of Shankara's interpretation. The word *apah* naturally and usually signifies "waters", and it is a law of interpretation not lightly to be set aside that when the natural and usual meaning of a word gives a satisfactory or even a possible and not unsuitable sense, it should be preferred to an artificial and unusual meaning. In this case "waters" may have two meanings one of which gives a sense possible and not unsuitable, the other a sense even more satisfactory than Shankara's interpretation. By waters may be indicated the various fluid forms which are evolved by the fluid element, and, involved in the solid, sustain organic life; for the word *apah* is commonly used to indicate the fourth element of matter. Prana, the vital energy, may be said so to dispose these "waters" as to originate, sustain and develop all solidities and all forms of organic life. But this would be a narrow interpretation out of harmony with the vast sweep and significance of this verse which sums up the Supreme Entity in its aspects as the stable substratum of cosmic existence, the mighty sum of cosmic motion and energy and the infinite continent of cosmic energy. It is better therefore to take *apah* in the sense of the original ocean of cosmic matter, a figure which is so common as to have become a commonplace of Hindu thought. In It, in Brahman, Matariswan, the aerial element took and disposed the infinite supply of causal matter so as to provide the substance, evolve the forms and coordinate the activities of this vast and complex Universe.

### IX. Spirit and Matter

But Matariswan does not conduct these numberless cosmic operations vast and minute by virtue of its own intrinsic and unborrowed power. Otherwise we might well ask, If there is a material substance which provides all the wherewithal necessary for the evolution of this Universe and a material energy by whose existence all the operations implied in its evolution can be explained, then the whole Universe can be understood as a development out of eternal Matter with its two properties substance and energy, and no second term of existence other than Matter need be brought in



to account for the evolution of Consciousness. But the Upanishad emphatically negatives the material origination of things by stating that it is in Brahman, the Supreme Entity, that Matariswan orders the waters. By this, as Shankara points out, it is meant that only so long as the Supreme Self is there, can the activity of Matariswan be conceived as possible. As ether, the matrix, is the continent and condition of Matariswan and his works, so is Brahman the continent and condition of ether and its evolution. Matariswan is born out of ether and works in ether, but ether is itself only an intermediate evolution; in reality, Matariswan is born out of Brahman the Self and works in Brahman the Self.

The materialistic theory of cosmic origins has a great superficial plausibility of its own and it is popular with scientists because analytical Science knows thoroughly the evolutions of matter and does not know thoroughly the evolutions of soul and spirit; it is therefore inevitably led to explain what it knows imperfectly or not at all by what it does know and understand. The materialistic tendency is immensely assisted by the universal interdependence of Spirit, Soul and Matter. Every spiritual and psychical activity involves a material operation and this Science has clearly seen. It is natural therefore for the Scientist to argue that the material operation is the cause of the spiritual and psychical activity, nay, that the material operation is the activity and spirit and soul do not exist, but are essentially matter. It is equally true that every material operation involves a spiritual and psychical activity, but this Science has not yet seen. When therefore idealistic philosophies argue in precisely the opposite sense and urge that the spiritual activity is the cause of the material operation, nay that the activity is the material operation and matter does not exist but is essentially spirit, it is natural for Science to brush aside the argument as metaphysical, mystical and irrational. I argue from the firm basis of well-tested certainties, thinks the Scientist, my opponent from mere ideas the truth of which cannot be demonstrated by definite evidence or actual experiment.

All Hindu philosophies, however, not only the Vedantic, but Sankhya and Buddhism agree in rejecting the materialistic reading of the Universe and oppose to the well-tested certainties of Science certainties as well-tested of their own. Hindu thought has its own analysis of the Universe arrived at by processes and experiments in which its faith is as assured and unshakeable as the confidence of the Scientist in his modern methods of analysis and observation. To a certain extent Hindu philosophy goes hand in hand with the materialistic. Prakriti or Nature, an original energy manifesting in substance is the origin, the material and the agent of evolution. This original energy is not Prana, the vital energy, for Prana is not original but a later evolution, arising out of the aerial condition of matter and subsequent in time to the ethereal; there must therefore have been a previous energy which evolved ether out of causal matter. To this original Matter Sankhya gives the name of Prakriti, while Vedanta & Buddhism, admitting the term Prakriti, prefer to call it Maya. But Prakriti is not in itself sufficient to explain the origin of the universe; another force

is required which will account for the activity of Prakriti in Pradhana or original substance. This force is Purusha or Spirit. It is the presence of Purusha and Prakriti together, says Sankhya, that can alone account for cosmic evolution. Vedanta agrees and emphasizes what Sankhya briefly assumes, — that Purusha & Prakriti are themselves merely aspects, obverse and reverse sides, of a single Supreme entity or Self of Things. Buddhism, still more trenchant, does away with the reality of Purusha and Prakriti altogether and regards Cosmic Evolution as a cosmic illusion.

The necessity for positing another force than Prakriti arises from the very nature of Prakriti and its operations. The fundamental characteristic of Prakriti as soon as it manifests is eternal motion, — motion without beginning, without end, without limit, without cessation or respite. Its cosmic stir is like an eternally troubled ocean, a ceaseless rush, foam and clamour of perpetual restlessness, infinite activity. And the rapidity, the variability, the unimaginably complex coincidence and simultaneousness of different rates and forms of motion in the same material, in the same limits of space and time, are such as to baffle realization. We can only realize it in sections by picking the web of Nature to pieces and regarding as separable and self-sufficient what are really simultaneous and coincident motions. The first result of this infinite complexity of motion is an infinite mutability. Wherever we turn our eyes, there is something evolving and developing, something decaying and disintegrating. Nothing at this moment is precisely what it was the moment before; every ripple in the sea of Time means a disturbance however small in the coincident sea of Space, a change however infinitesimal in the condition of the largest or most apparently stable parts of Nature as well as of the minutest or most volatile. Causality, infinite and without beginning or end, cannot cease from its perpetuity of persistent action, its infinite progression of effects which are the causes of other effects, causes which are the effects of other causes; it is an endless chain, moving through Space & Time, working in Substance, forged by an eternal and indefinable Energy. And this eternal motion and mutability means inevitably an infinite multiplicity. Every inch of Space is thronged with an infinite variety of animate and inanimate existences, countless in number, multitudinous in kind, myriadly various in motion and action. An infinite multiplicity of motions make up the world creating endless variety of substance, form, function; an infinite multiplicity of change is the condition of its activity. Remove this eternal motion, eternal mutability, eternal multiplicity from the idea of Prakriti and we arrive at something we cannot recognize, an inactive energy, an immaterial substance. Without motion, Time, Space, Causality, as things in themselves, cease to be. We are face to face with blank void and nothingness — or else, since this is unimaginable and impossible, we must suppose something which cannot cease to be, an absolute Infinity undivided by Space or Time, an absolute Immutability unconditioned by cause and effect, an absolute Stillness unaffected by the illusive mobilities of Energy, an absolute Spirit ultimately real behind the phenomenon of substance.

If we do not accept this transcendental reality, we must suppose that an eternal Prakriti with eternal motion, mutability, multiplicity as its characteristics is the Alpha & Omega of existence. But a consideration of the Universe does not justify our resting secure in that hypothesis. In this eternal motion there is something perpetually stable, in this eternal mutability a sum and reality which is immutable; in this eternal multiplicity an initial, persistent and final Unity. Eternal motion in itself would lead to nothing but eternal chaos and confusion. We know that the Cosmos is made up of an infinite number of motions simultaneously occupying the same Space and simultaneously existent in the same substance; but the result is not clash or confusion, but harmony. In other words, the condition of this unending motion is an eternal stability. Everywhere we see variety of motion resulting in a harmonious balance, in the orbits of the revolving planets round the moving sun woven into one solar system we have a striking instance out of myriads of this law which governs every object and every organism. There is therefore not only the mobile Prakriti, but something else which is eternally stable.

Eternal mutability, likewise, can lead to nothing but eternal unrest and disorder. What is it that imposes an unchanging law of persistence and orderly development on this mass of infinitely shifting, unquiet and impermanent parts and combines into one harmony this confused strife of changing and interchanging phenomena? In its details the universe is restlessly mutable, momentarily changing, in its broad masses it is more fixed and permanent, in its sum it is immutable. The class is less mutable and impermanent than the man, the community than the class, the race than the community, mankind than the race; and so it is with all existences. The parts change, the whole persists. And it is well known that while matter goes through infinite changes of form, its sum never changes; unincreasing it develops, undiminishing it disintegrates. But not only is the sum of things immutable, the laws of their development are immutable; phenomena vary but the law governing them remains the same, and for this reason that the nature of things is immutable. Whatever the variety of forms, the thing in itself preserves its characteristics and remains unchanged. Electricity works in various shapes and in many activities, but it is always electricity preserving its true characteristics whatever work it may do or whatever body it may wear and always working and changing under the fixed laws of its being which cannot change. Electricity again is only one form and function of the igneous element which takes many forms, but in all of them preserves its true characteristics and its own law of work. We see therefore that the parts are impermanent, the whole permanent; forms of things change, the reality is immutable. The condition of this unending mutability and impermanence is an eternal immutability and permanence. There is therefore not only this mutable Prakriti, but something else which is eternally immutable.

The apparent multiplicity of the Universe is equally deceptive. For the very condition of this infinite multiplicity, is a persistent Unity which precedes it and

towards which it moves. There are many substances, but they are all evolutions from one substance; one seed disposes itself in many forms. There are many laws governing the workings of that substance in its evolution but they resolve themselves into one law to which all existence is subject. As substances and forms develop, there seem to be many things with many natures, but they go back into one thing with one nature. There are many forms of electricity, but all resolve themselves into the one substance electricity; there are many forms of the igneous element, of which electricity is one, but they all resolve themselves into one igneous element; there are many elements besides the igneous, but they all resolve themselves into one causal and universal substance. This is the bottom fact of the universe; all complexities and varieties resolve themselves into a precedent simplicity, and all simplicities into an original Unity. There is therefore not only this ever-multiplying Prakriti, but something else which is eternally One. In this mobile, mutable, multitudinous Prakriti, there is then a persistent element which is stable, immutable and one. We have arrived again at that One infinitely Immutable, Immobile Sum and Reality of Things which is Parabrahman.

Materialistic Analysis insists however that the eternal unity, immutability and immobility supporting and making possible the eternal multiplicity, mutability and motion are themselves characteristics of Eternal Matter. They are the two opposing lines of force whose action and reaction preserve the equilibrium of cosmic existence, but the eternal reality in which they act is not spiritual but material. For material energy working in material substance is quite enough to explain all the evolutions of Nature and these in themselves make Eternal Matter. Hindu thought, however, has always been unable to accept this conclusion because its analysis of cosmic existence has convinced it that substance and energy are not things in themselves, but merely phenomena. Substance increases with density until it reaches its highest expression in solid physical matter; but as it is analysed and resolved nearer and nearer to its origin, its density becomes less and less, its tenuity increases, it becomes more and more unsubstantial, until, on the farther brink of causal matter, it disappears into something which is not substance. Moreover, when examined it appears that substance is really another term for energy; the conditions of density and tenuity which constitute material substance, correspond with the conditions of motional intensity and vagueness which constitute material energy. As, therefore, matter is resolved nearer and nearer to its origins, energy like substance becomes less and less intense, its vagueness increases until it comes to a standstill or rather dissipates in something which is not energy. The conclusion is irresistible that substance and energy are merely a single phenomenon with a double aspect, and that in the origin of things this phenomenon, to which we may give the name of Matter, does not exist. The question remains, into what do substance and energy disappear? out of what were they born? We are confronted again with the necessity of choosing between the unimaginable impossibility of blank void and nothingness, for which we have

no warrant in reason or experience, or the One, Immutable, Immobile, Infinite and Eternal Reality which is Parabrahman. This Supreme Entity is not matter, we have seen. But it may be argued that it cannot be certainly called Spirit, since it is so absolute an entity as to be indefinable except by negatives. Vedanta concedes this caution, asserting only that Parabrahman is not a negative entity, but an eternal and positive Reality, defined by negatives simply because it is not expressible to the finite intellect, and containing in itself the unity of Spirit and Matter, which is neither material nor spiritual.

One argument remains open to material Analysis. Granted Parabrahman as the reality of things, yet phenomenal existence itself is purely material and there is no need to call in the assistance of any other and different entity. For material energy in material substance is sufficient to explain all phenomena. Hindu thought holds however that it is not sufficient to explain the ultimate phenomena of Consciousness. At the beginning of material evolution matter is in itself inanimate, consciousness, to all appearance, non-existent. How and whence, then, did it appear? By the interaction of the three *gunas* inherent in Prakriti, reception, reaction, retention. But the interaction of the three *gunas* did not create Consciousness, they only liberated it from the dense obscuration of gross matter. For if consciousness were not involved in Matter, it could never be evolved from it. For if it be evolved from matter as an entirely new birth, it must be either some already existent material substance in a new form — say, some kind of gas or electricity, or it must be a new substance formed by the union of two or more substances, just as water is formed out of hydrogen and oxygen. No such gas or electricity has been discovered, no such new substance exists. Indeed the evolution of a mighty, reasoning, aspiring, conquering, irrepressible Consciousness, capable of something like omnipotence and omniscience, out of mere material gases and chemical substance is a paradox so hardy, so colossally and impossibly audacious that mankind has rightly refused to accept it even when advanced with the prestige of Science and her triumphant analysis and the almost irresistible authority of her ablest exponents to support the absurdity. Christian theology was inconsistent enough when it degraded man to the dust as a worm and clod, yet declared him capable of divinity by the easy process of belief in an irrational dogma; but the materialistic paradox, which lodges no hidden angel in the flesh, is even more startling, more naked, more inexorably irrational. Man, says materialistic Science, is an utterly insignificant unit in the universe; the infinitesimal creature of a day, he lives his short span of life and is then decomposed into the gases out of which he was made. He derives his mind, body and moral nature from his brother the chimpanzee and his father the gorilla. In his organism he is merely a mass of animalculae which belong individually to the lowest stage of animal life; but by combining into a republic with the cells of the brain as a sort of despotic senate or council, these undeveloped forms of life have been able to master the world. What has not this republic of animalculae, this Rome of protoplasms, been

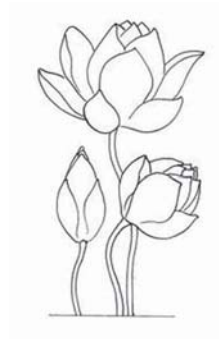
able to effect? It has analysed the elements; it has weighed the suns and measured the orbits of the stars; it has written the dramas of Shakespeare, the epics of Valmekie and Homer and Vyasa, the philosophies of Kant and Shankara; it has harnessed the forces of Nature to do its bidding; it has understood existence and grasped the conception of infinity. There is something fascinatingly romantic and interesting in the conception and it is not surprising that the human intellect should have been captured for a while by its cheerful audacity. But how long can unreason prevail? Even if we regard man as a limited being and take what the race has done for the utmost measure of what the individual can do, the disproportion between the results achieved and the means supplied by this theory is too great to be overlooked. It was inevitable that the religions formerly crushed down and almost smothered by the discoveries of Science, — even those creeds most philosophically insufficient and crude, — should be raising their heads and showing an unexpected vitality. Science prevailed for a time over religion by exposing the irrationalities and prejudices which had overgrown and incrustated spiritual truth. But when it sought to replace them by a more astounding irrationality than any religion had been guilty of and began to contract its own hard crust of dogmas and prejudices, it exposed itself to an inevitable reaction. Mankind for a time believed because it was incredible at the bidding of theologians who ruled reason out of court; the experiment is not likely to be repeated for long on the authority of scientists who profess to make reason their judge.

If it be still contended that, however paradoxical, consciousness is the result of impressions and vibrations in the brain, or that consciousness is merely a material energy manifested at a particular intensity of ethereal vibration, like light or sound, the answer is that consciousness operates more powerfully when the brain is quiescent and unimpressed from without and survives cellular decomposition, and that when energy is quiescent and ether dissolved into its origin, consciousness abides. To the Hindu mind this is an insuperable obstacle to the acceptance of the material origin of consciousness. From its long acquaintance with Yoga and the results of Yoga, it has learned that conscious Will in the human body can not only override the laws of gross physical matter and come appreciably nearer, within its sphere, to omnipotence and omniscience, but that this conscious Will can impose absolute quietude on and detach itself from the animalcule republic which is erroneously supposed to originate and contain it and that it does, as a habitual law of Nature, survive the disintegration of the body. These two facts are fatal to the materialistic theory and, so long as the practice of Yoga subsists in India, the Hindu mind will never accept materialism. For they show that, although undeniably consciousness is evolved out of gross matter, it can only be because it was involved into gross matter by a previous downward evolution; it is not being created, it is being merely liberated from its prison. Neither can consciousness be taken as a function of subtle matter; for just as it can exist apart from and survives the disintegration of its gross body, so also it can

exist apart from and survives the disintegration of its subtle body. Before subtle matter evolves, consciousness preexists in causal matter; and after subtle matter dissolves, consciousness survives in causal matter. And since matter at the stage of causality neither functions, nor evolves, consciousness is not a function or evolution of causal matter, but other and different from it. It is clear therefore that from the first appearance of matter, consciousness operates coevally with it, but is not dependent on it for its origin.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Isha Upanishad, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 252-66)*





## MATARISHWAN — THE LIFE-GOD, VAYU (VAYU — THE LORD OF LIFE)

VAYU is the Lord of Life. By the ancient Mystics life was considered to be a great force pervading all material existence and the condition of all its activities. It is this idea that was formulated later on in the conception of the Prana, the universal breath of life. All the vital and nervous activities of the human being fall within the definition of Prana, and belong to the domain of Vayu. Yet this great deity has comparatively few hymns to his share in the Rig Veda and even in those Suktas in which he is prominently invoked, does not usually figure alone but in company with others and as if dependent on them. He is especially coupled with Indra and it would almost seem as if for the functionings demanded from him by the Vedic Rishis he needed the aid of the superior deity. When there is question of the divine action of the Life-forces in man, Agni in the form of the Vedic Horse, Ashwa, Dadhikravan, takes usually the place of Vayu.

If we consider the fundamental ideas of the Rishis, this position of Vayu becomes intelligible. The illumination of the lower being by the higher, the mortal by the divine, was their principal concept. Light and Force, Go and Ashwa, the Cow and the Horse, were the object of the sacrifice. Force was the condition, Light the liberating agency; and Indra and Surya were the chief bringers of Light. Moreover the Force required was the divine Will taking possession of all the human energies and revealing itself in them; and of this Will, this force of conscious energy taking possession of the nervous vitality and revealing itself in it, Agni more than Vayu and especially Agni Dadhikravan was the symbol. For it is Agni who is master of Tapas, the divine Consciousness formulating itself in universal energy, of which the Prana is only a representative in the lower being. Therefore in Vamadeva's hymn, the fifty-eighth of the fourth Mandala, it is Indra and Surya and Agni who effect the great manifestation of the conscious divinity out of the subconscious. Vata or Vayu, the nervous activity, is only a first condition of the emergent Mind. And for man it is the meeting of Life with Mind and the support given by the former to the evolution of the latter which is the important aspect of Vayu. Therefore we find Indra, Master of Mind, and Vayu, Master of Life, coupled together and the latter always somewhat dependent on the former; the Maruts, the thought-forces, although in their origin they seem to be as much powers of Vayu as of Indra, are more important to the Rishis than Vayu himself and even in their dynamic aspect are more closely associated with Agni Rudra than with the natural chief of the legions of the Air.

The present hymn, the forty-eighth of the Mandala, is the last of three in which Vamadeva invokes Indra and Vayu for the drinking of the Soma-wine. They are called in conjointly as the two lords of brilliant force, *śavasaspatī*, as in another



hymn, in a former Mandala, they are invoked as lords of thought, *dhiyaspati*. Indra is the master of mental force, Vayu of nervous or vital force and their union is necessary for thought and for action. They are invited to come in one common chariot and drink together of the wine of the Ananda which brings with it the divinising energies. Vayu, it is said, has the right of the first draught; for it is the supporting vital forces that must first become capable of the ecstasy of the divine action.

In the third hymn, in which the result of the sacrifice is defined, Vayu is alone invoked, but even so his companionship with Indra is clearly indicated. He is to come in a chariot of happy brightness, like Usha in another hymn, to drink of the immortalising wine.<sup>1</sup> The chariot symbolises movement of energy and it is a glad movement of already illuminated vital energies that is invoked in the form of Vayu. The divine utility of this brightly happy movement is indicated in the first three verses.

The god is to manifest — he is to bring into the light of the conscious activity sacrificial energies which are not yet manifested,<sup>2</sup> are yet hidden in the darkness of the subconscious. In the ritualistic interpretation the phrase may be translated, “Eat of offerings that have not been eaten” or, in another sense of the verb *vī*, it may be rendered “Arrive at sacrificial energies which have never been approached”; but all these renderings amount, symbolically, to the same psychological sense. Powers and activities that have not yet been called up out of the subconscious, have to be liberated from its secret cave by the combined action of Indra and Vayu and devoted to the work.

For it is not towards an ordinary action of the nervous mentality that they are called. Vayu is to manifest these energies as would “a revealer of the felicity, a doer of the Aryan work”, *vipo na rāyo aryaḥ*. These words sufficiently indicate the nature of the energies that are to be evoked. It is possible, however, that the phrase may have a covert reference to Indra and thus indicate what is afterwards clearly expressed, the necessity that Vayu’s action should be governed by the illumined and aspiring force of the more brilliant god. For it is Indra’s enlightenment that leads to the secret of beatitude being revealed and he is the first labourer in the Work. To Indra, Agni and Surya among the gods is especially applied the term *arya*, which describes with an untranslatable compactness those who rise to the noble aspiration and who do the great labour as an offering in order to arrive at the good and the bliss.

In the second verse the necessity of Indra’s guidance is affirmed expressly. Vayu is to come putting away all denials that may be opposed to the manifestation of the unmanifested, *niryuvāṇo aśastīḥ*. The word *aśastīḥ* means literally “not-

1. *Vāyavā candreṇa rathena yāhi sutasya pītaye.*

2. *Vīhi hotrā avitā.*

expressings” and describes the detention by obscuring powers like Vritra of the light and power that are waiting to be revealed, ready to be called out into expression through the influence of the gods and by the instrumentality of the Word. The Word is the power that expresses, *śaṣṭram*, *gir*, *vacas*. But it has to be protected and given its right effect by the divine Powers. Vayu is to do this office; he has to expel all powers of denial, of obscurity, of non-manifestation. To do this work he must arrive “with his steeds of the yoking and Indra for charioteer”, *niyutvān indra-sārathiḥ*. The steeds of Indra, of Vayu, of Surya have each their appropriate name. Indra’s horses are *hari* or *babhru*, red gold or tawny yellow; Surya’s *harit*, indicating a more deep, full and intense luminousness; Vayu’s are *niyut*, steeds of the yoking, for they represent those dynamic movements which yoke the energy to its action. But although they are the horses of Vayu, they have to be driven by Indra, the movements of the Master of nervous and vital energy guided by the Master of mind.

The third verse<sup>3</sup> would seem at first to bring in an unconnected idea; it speaks of a dark Heaven and Earth with all their forms obeying or following in their labour the movements of Vayu in his Indra-driven car. They are not mentioned by name but described as the two black or dark holders of substance or holders of wealth, *vasudhitī*; but the latter word sufficiently indicates earth and by implication of the dual form Heaven also, its companion. We must note that it is not Heaven the father and Earth the mother that are indicated, but the two sisters, Rodasi, feminine forms of heaven and earth, who symbolise the general energies of the mental and physical consciousness. It is their dark states — the obscured consciousness between its two limits of the mental and the physical, — which by the happy movement of the nervous dynamism begin to labour in accordance with the movement or under the control of Vayu and to yield up their hidden forms; for all forms are concealed in them and they must be compelled to reveal them. Thus we discover that this verse completes the sense of the two that precede. For always when the Veda is properly understood, its verses are seen to unroll the thought with a profound logical coherence and pregnant succession.

The two remaining riks indicate the result produced by this action of Heaven and Earth and by their yielding up of hidden forms and unmanifested energies on the movement of Vayu as his car gallops towards the Ananda. First of all his horses are to attain their normally complete general number. “Let the ninety-nine be yoked and bear thee, those that are yoked by the mind.”<sup>4</sup> The constantly recurring numbers ninety-nine, a hundred and a thousand have a symbolic significance in the Veda which it is very difficult to disengage with any precision. The secret is perhaps to be found in the multiplication of the mystic number seven by itself and its double

3. *Anu kṛṣṇe vasudhitī yemāte viśvapeśasā.*

4. *Vahantu tvā manoyujo yuktāso navatir nava.*

repetition with a unit added before and at the end, making altogether  $1+49+49+1=100$ . Seven is the number of essential principles in manifested Nature, the seven forms of divine consciousness at play in the world. Each, formulated severally, contains the other six in itself; thus the full number is forty-nine, and to this is added the unit above out of which all develops, giving us altogether a scale of fifty and forming the complete gamut of active consciousness. But there is also its duplication by an ascending and descending series, the descent of the gods, the ascent of man. This gives us ninety-nine, the number variously applied in the Veda to horses, cities, rivers, in each case with a separate but kindred symbolism. If we add an obscure unit below into which all descends to the luminous unit above towards which all ascends we have the full scale of one hundred.

It is therefore a complex energy of consciousness which is to be the result of Vayu's movement; it is the emergence of the fullest movement of the mental activity now only latent and potential in man, — the ninety and nine steeds that are yoked by the mind. And in the next verse the culminating unit is added. We have a hundred horses, and because the action is now that of complete luminous mentality, these steeds, though they still carry Vayu and Indra, are no longer merely *niyut*, but *hari*, the colour of Indra's brilliant bays.<sup>5</sup> "Yoke, O Vayu, a hundred of the brilliant ones, that are to be increased."

But why to be increased? Because a hundred represents the general fullness of the variously combined movements, but not their utter complexity. Each of the hundred can be multiplied by ten; all can be increased in their own kind: for that is the nature of the increase indicated by the word *poṣyāṇām*. Therefore, says the Rishi, either come with the general fullness of the hundred to be afterwards nourished into their full complexity of a hundred tens or, if thou wilt, come at once with thy thousand and let thy movement arrive in the utter mass of its entire potential energy.<sup>6</sup> It is the completely varied all-ensphering, all-energising mental illumination with its full perfection of being, power, bliss, knowledge, mentality, vital force, physical activity that he desires. For, this attained, the subconscious is compelled to yield up all its hidden possibilities at the will of the perfected mind for the rich and abundant movement of the perfected life.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, Vol. 15, pp. 309-14)

5. *Vāyo śataṁ hariṇāṁ yuvasva poṣyāṇām.*

6. *Uta vā te sahasriṇo ratha ā yātu pājasā.*

## **‘TO LIVE THY LOVE, TO RADIATE THY LOVE . . .’**

*On board the “Kaga Maru”,  
March 7, 1914*

THOU wert with us yesterday as the most marvellous of protections; Thou didst permit Thy law to triumph even in the most external manifestation. Violence was answered by calm, brutality by the strength of sweetness; and where an irreparable disaster would have occurred, Thy power was glorified. O Lord, with what fervent gratitude did I greet Thy Presence. It was for me the sure sign that we would have the strength to act, to think, to live in Thy name and for Thee; not only in intention and will, but effectively in an integral realisation.

\*This morning my prayer rises to Thee, always with the same aspiration: to live Thy love, to radiate Thy love, with such potency and effectiveness that all may feel fortified, regenerated and illumined by our contact. To have power to heal life, to relieve suffering, to generate peace and calm confidence, to efface anguish and replace it by the sense of the one true happiness, the happiness that is founded in Thee and never fades. . . . O Lord, O marvellous Friend, O all-powerful Master, penetrate all our being, transfigure it till Thou alone livest in us and through us!\*

THE MOTHER

The portion marked with an \* has been translated by Sri Aurobindo

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 91)*

## A CONVERSATION OF 18 JULY 1961

[The question which introduces this talk is based upon Sri Aurobindo's aphorism: "Sin is that which was once in its place, persisting now it is out of place; there is no other sinfulness."]

*What are the very first things that the Supramental Force intends to drive out, or is trying to drive out, so that everything may be in its place, individually and cosmically?*

DRIVE out? But will it "drive out" anything? If we accept Sri Aurobindo's idea, it will put each thing in its place, that's all.

One thing must necessarily cease, and that is the distortion, that is to say, the veil of falsehood upon Truth, because that is what is responsible for everything we see here. If this is removed, things will be completely different, completely. They will be what we feel them to be when we come out of this consciousness. When one comes out of this consciousness and enters into the Truth-consciousness, the difference is such that one wonders how there can be anything like suffering and misery and death and all that. There is a kind of astonishment in the sense that one does not understand how it can happen — when one has really tipped over to the other side. But this experience is usually associated with the experience of the unreality of the world as we know it, whereas Sri Aurobindo says that this perception of the unreality of the world is not necessary in order to live in the supramental consciousness — it is only the unreality of Falsehood, not the unreality of the world. That is to say, the world has a reality of its own, independent of Falsehood.

I suppose that is the first effect of the Supermind — the first effect in the individual, because it will begin with the individual.

It is probable that this state of new consciousness will have to become a constant state. But then a problem arises: how can one remain in contact with the world as it is in its deformation? Because I have noticed one thing: when this state is very strong in me, very strong, so strong that it is able to resist anything that comes to bombard it from outside, then when I say something, people do not understand at all, not at all; so this state inevitably does away with a useful contact.

Taking only the earth, for example, how could there be a little supramental creation, a nucleus of supramental action and radiation upon earth? Is it possible? One can conceive very well of a nucleus of superhuman creation and of supermen, that is to say, men who were men and who through evolution and transformation (in the true sense of the word) have succeeded in manifesting the supramental forces; but their origin is human and since their origin is human there is necessarily a

contact; even if everything is transformed, even if the organs are transformed into centres of force, there remains nonetheless something human, like a colouring. It is these beings, according to the traditions, who will discover the secret of direct supramental creation, without passing through the process of ordinary Nature, and it is through them that the truly supramental beings will take birth, the ones who must necessarily live in a supramental world. But then how would the contact be made between these beings and the ordinary world? How is one to conceive of the transformation of Nature, a transformation sufficient to bring about the supramental creation upon earth? I do not know.

Naturally, for such a thing to happen, a considerably long time is needed, this we know; and there will probably be stages, steps, things which will appear, things which for the moment we do not know or do not conceive, and they will change the conditions of the earth — but that means seeing some thousands of years ahead.

There remains the problem: is it possible to make use of this notion of space, I mean the space on the terrestrial globe?<sup>1</sup> Is it possible to find a spot where one could create the embryo or seed of the future supramental world? The plan came in all the details, but it is a plan which in its spirit and consciousness does not at all conform to what is possible on earth at present; yet in its most material manifestation, it was based on terrestrial conditions. It is the concept of an ideal town which would be the nucleus of an ideal country, a town which would have contacts, purely superficial and extremely limited in their effect, with the outside world. One would therefore already have to conceive — but this is possible — of a power sufficiently strong to be at the same time a protection against aggression or ill-will (this would not be the most difficult protection to obtain) and against infiltration and admixtures. But if necessary, one can conceive of that. From the social point of view, from the point of view of organisation, from the point of view of the inner life, these are not problems. The problem is the relation with what is not supramentalised, to prevent the infiltration, the admixture: that is to say, to prevent the nucleus from falling back into an inferior creation — it is a problem about the period of transition.

All those who have given thought to the problem have always imagined something unknown to the rest of humanity, like a gorge in the Himalayas, for example, a place unknown to the rest of the world. But this is not a solution; it is not a solution at all.

No, the only solution is an occult power, but this already implies that before anything can be done, a certain number of individuals must have reached a great perfection of realisation. But one can conceive that if this can be done, one can have a spot which is in the midst of the outside world and yet isolated (without any contacts, you see), a spot where everything would be exactly in its place — as an

1. Later, when asked about the meaning of this phrase, the Mother laughed and said: "I said that of the other side! — the side where the notion of space is not so concrete."

example. Each thing is exactly in its place, each person exactly in his place, each movement exactly in its place — and in its place in an ascending progressive movement, without any relapse, that is to say, quite the contrary to what happens in ordinary life. Naturally, this presupposes a kind of perfection, this presupposes a kind of unity, this presupposes that the different aspects of the Supreme can be manifested and, of course, an exceptional beauty, a total harmony and a power strong enough to command obedience from the forces of Nature. For example, even if this spot were surrounded by forces of destruction, they would not have the power to act; the protection would be sufficient. All this requires the utmost perfection in the individuals who would be the organisers of such a thing.

(Silence)

Indeed, nobody knows how the first men were formed, the first mental realisation. One does not know whether they were isolated individuals or groups, whether this happened in the midst of others or in isolation. I do not know. But there may be an analogy with the future case of the supramental creation. It is not difficult to conceive that in the solitude of the Himalayas or in the solitude of a virgin forest an individual would begin to create around him his little supramental world. It is easy to conceive. But the same thing would be necessary: he would have to have reached such a perfection that his power would act automatically to prevent intrusion, so that automatically his world would be protected; that is to say, all contrary or foreign elements would be prevented from approaching.

Stories of the kind have been told, of people who lived in an ideal solitude. It is not impossible at all to conceive that. When one is in contact with this Power, at the moment it is in you, you see quite well that it is child's play; it is even possible to change certain things, to exert an influence on surrounding vibrations and forms, which automatically begin to be supramentalised. All that is possible, but it is on an individual scale. Whereas, take the example of what is happening here, the individual dwelling at the very centre of all this chaos: there lies the difficulty! Does it not follow from this very fact that it is impossible to reach a kind of perfection in the realisation? But then too, the other example, that of the solitary in the forest, does not at all prove that the rest of mankind will be able to follow; whereas what is happening here is already a much more radiating action. This is what must happen at a given moment, this must happen inevitably. But the problem remains: can this happen at the same time or before the other thing is realised — at the same time or before the individual, the one individual is supramentalised?

Evidently, the realisation under the conditions of community or the group is much more complete, integral, total and probably more perfect than any individual realisation, which is always, *necessarily*, on the external, material plane, absolutely limited, because it is only one mode of being, one mode of manifestation, one

microscopic set of vibrations that is touched.

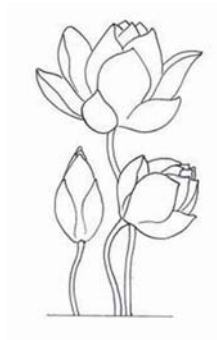
But from the point of view of the easiness of the work, I believe there is no comparison.

*(Silence)*

The problem remains. All people like Buddha and the others, had *first* realised and then entered into contact with the world: well, this is very simple. But with regard to what I have in view, is it not an indispensable condition, for the realisation to be total, that one remains in the world?

THE MOTHER

*(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 383-87)*





## **“WHAT A CHILD SHOULD ALWAYS REMEMBER”**

*The necessity of an absolute sincerity.*

*The certitude of Truth's final victory.*

*The possibility of constant progress with the will to achieve.*

WHY do I insist on absolute sincerity? Perhaps the younger children don't understand what sincerity is, but the older ones surely ought to know! You have all passed through childhood and you probably remember what you were taught, what you were told when you were young. Parents nearly always tell their children, "You must not lie, it is very bad to tell a lie." But the unfortunate thing is that they lie in your presence and then you wonder why they want you to do something which they don't do themselves.

But, apart from that, why do I insist on the fact that children should be told from a very early age that it is absolutely necessary to be sincere? I am not addressing those who were brought up here, but those who were brought up in an ordinary family, with ordinary ideas. Children are very often taught how to outsmart others, how to dissimulate so as to appear good in others' eyes. Some parents try to control children through fear, and that is the worst possible method of education, for it is an incentive to lying, deceit, hypocrisy and all the rest. But if you repeatedly explain to children something of this kind: If you are not absolutely sincere, not only with others but also with yourself, if at any time you try to cover up your imperfections and failings, you will never make any progress, you will always remain what you are throughout all your life, without ever making any progress. So, even if you only want to grow out of this primitive unconscious state into a progressive consciousness, the most important thing, the one absolutely important thing is sincerity. If you have done something which you ought not to have done, you must admit it to yourself; if a less-than-admirable movement has occurred in yourself, you must look it in the face and tell yourself, "It was not good," or "It was disgusting," or even "It was wicked."

And don't think that there are people to whom this rule does not apply, for you cannot live in the physical world without having a share in the physical nature, and physical nature is essentially a mixture. You will see, when you become absolutely sincere, that there is nothing in yourself that is absolutely unmixed. But it is only when you look yourself in the face, in the light of your highest consciousness, that whatever you want to eliminate from your nature will disappear. Without this striving for absolute sincerity, the defect, the little shadow, will stay in a corner biding its time to come out.

I am not speaking of the vital, which is hypocritical, I am merely speaking of

the mind. If you have a small, disagreeable sensation, a slight uneasiness, see how quickly the mind gives you a favourable explanation! It lays the blame on someone else or on the circumstances, it says that what you did was right and that you are not responsible, and so on. If you look carefully into yourself, you will see that it is like that and you will find it most amusing too! If a child starts examining himself carefully very early, observing himself honestly so as not to deceive himself or deceive others, it will become a habit and spare him much struggling later on.

Now I am addressing parents and teachers, for it is very important to teach children that it is absolutely useless to “look” as if they were good, to “look” as if they were obedient, to “look” as if they were studying well, etc. Very often, the course parents and teachers adopt with their children is to encourage them to “look as if”. It often happens that if a child spontaneously confesses his mistake, he is given a scolding. This is one of the greatest mistakes of parents. You must have sufficient control over yourself never to scold a child, even if he has broken a very valuable and cherished object. You should simply ask him, “How did you do that?” “What happened?” For the child ought to see why it happened, so that he can be more careful next time. But that is all. In this way you will get the child to be sincere with you instead of trying to deceive you.

The greatest obstacle to the transformation of one’s own character is hypocrisy. If you always keep this in mind when dealing with a child, you can do him a lot of good. Of course, you must not sermonise or lecture him, etc. You should simply make him understand that there is a nobility in the being, a great purity, a great love of beauty, which is so powerful that even the most wicked and criminal people are forced to acknowledge a truly beautiful or heroic or selfless act.

For, in human beings, there is a presence, the most marvellous Presence on earth, and except in a few very rare cases which I need not mention here, this presence lies asleep in the heart — not the physical heart but the psychic centre — of all beings. And when this Splendour is manifested with enough purity, it will awaken in all beings the echo of this Presence.

*Why does insincerity get such a sanction from society?*

Because society is obsessed with success.

*Is there a difference between sincerity and loyalty?*

There is always a difference between two different things. Of course, it is very difficult, I suppose, to be loyal without being sincere, and vice versa. But I have known people who were loyal and yet lacked a certain kind of sincerity. The opposite is not unusual. The one doesn’t automatically follow from the other, but it is obvious that honesty, straightforwardness, loyalty and sincerity are closely related. I think

that it is extremely difficult for someone to be perfectly sincere without being loyal and honest, but of course this demands the utmost.

*Isn't loyalty limited by a feeling for something or someone? Isn't sincerity something wider?*

Yes, it is. Loyalty implies some kind of hierarchical relationship, so to say, with someone or something. There is a sort of interdependence. The usual idea is that loyalty means keeping one's word, doing one's duty scrupulously, etc.

Someone who lives all alone in a forest can practise total sincerity, but you can only practise loyalty in social life, in relation to other people. A person who is entirely consecrated in an act of inner devotion to the divine Presence, can be loyal to this Presence. This implies a relationship with something in front of you, or a relationship with the universal.

*The German generals were loyal to Hitler, but they weren't sincere with themselves.*

This is a very complex problem. They might have been sincere in relation to their own ideal. You do not know.

I have known beings who were the most active instruments against the divine life, against the divine realisation. Well, to some extent, they were loyal to their own ideal and very sincere in their . . . <sup>1</sup> These beings are called Asuras, but as I have just said, they were sincere in relation to their own ideal.

*So sincerity is not enough?*

I didn't say they had an absolute sincerity. I simply said that they were very sincere. Perhaps, in some part of their being, there was something that did not try to know any more than it knew. It is quite probable.

*Some people think they have achieved absolute sincerity.*

If you are *sure* you have achieved absolute sincerity, you can be sure that you are immersed in falsehood.

6 January 1951

THE MOTHER

(*Words of the Mother – III*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 297-301)

1. Words missing in the transcription

## “SUN-SPELL” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

I have tried to interpret the atmospheric spell in which at times everything is enveloped in a quietly intense colour shed from the clouds.

### SUN-SPELL

In cloud-suspense the faint breeze died;  
A deep glow spread on every side:  
The firmamental hush came down,  
A mirrored soul of aureate brown,  
Subduing each form-shade to one  
Pervasive ecstasy of sun.  
No leaf-stir and no flitting mood  
Profaned the holy quietude [1]  
In which the strange responding earth  
Travailed with some miraculous birth —  
As though a presence richly far,  
Flowering like a vague gold star,  
Trembled within her undefiled  
Womb-vision — a shadowless spirit-child [2]  
Whose splendour of futurity  
Would celebrate immortally  
The secret hour when, on the dazzled clay,  
Like an eternal lover silence lay . . .

[*Amal's questions written in the left margin:*]

[1] Is it necessary to stop after “quietude” and start a new sentence with a “Therein”?

[2] Should this “a” be dropped?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[1] No, it is much better as it is

[2] No, it is needed

It is very good.

8 February 1934

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

# SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction — 1* **An Inexplicable Phenomenon**

No attempt at constructing a biography of Sri Aurobindo can be free from a powerful inhibition exercised by the Master's caution that nobody could write about his life because it had not been on the surface for men to see. Notwithstanding this caveat, numerous biographies have been written and the earliest one in English was published, obviously without his knowledge, in the year 1911, only a year after he came over to Pondicherry.<sup>1</sup>

Tumultuous events marked his external life, even in that short span of about five years (1905-1910) he devoted to active politics, residing for the most part in Kolkata (then Calcutta). Willy-nilly, he had become the most significant as well as the most popular leader of the radical wing of the Indian National Congress. Significant, because there is no evidence of any other national figure of the decade causing so much anxiety to the British rulers of India on the one hand and inspiring such love and reverence in the best of the creative genius of the time on the other. While in the eyes of the Governor General of India he was the most dangerous man in the country, for Rabindranath Tagore he was the voice-incarnate of India's soul. Simple in appearance and austere dressed, mild-mannered and soft-spoken, he could keep his audience, often comprising of thousands, spell-bound — although only a small percentage of his listeners could follow his British accent — even when great orators failed to sustain their attention. *The Times* of London carried several reports of his speeches in its issues of July and August 1909. Here is one in which this truth becomes obvious despite its sardonic tenor:

As things were, the audience on August 7 consisted of about 5000 persons of whom about a half was youthful. . . . The sole orator of the Calcutta boycott meeting, Babu Bhupendranath Bose, excited no enthusiasm whatever, partly because his speech was too moderate and partly because it was only audible to a small number. The Bengalees have primitive ideas as to the organisation of a meeting and Babu Bhupendranath was expected to harangue an open-air audience, numbering some thousands, from the top of a small dining table. Mr. Bradlaugh or Dr. Clifford<sup>2</sup> would have failed under such conditions. *The remarkable fact was, however, that damped as the crowd was by a lone essay,*

*it burst into loud cheering when Mr. Aurobindo Ghose was seen standing near the dining table aforesaid. He was unquestionably the hero of the meeting.* (Italics added.)<sup>3</sup>

Here it would be relevant to look at the first-hand account left by one of his young listeners, Jyotish Chandra Ghosh, who later rose to much eminence:

He was amiable in disposition and was mild, gentle in his manners. When he would speak, he would do so in soft musical accents and his words in a private conversation had the effect of soothing the troubled nerves of the hearer, not by virtue of its intellectual impressiveness but by a sort of ethereal transmission of a psychic, spiritual fluid, so to say. . . . When he spoke in public, he would resign himself to a Power and not even think what he was going to say and would stand fixed like a statue, his nerves vibrating in response to a divine rhythm and we felt as we heard him that he had simply kept his psychic senses open and was just repeating automatically what he heard uttered by some invisible Power in his ears.<sup>4</sup>

Some inexplicable trait of his personality impressed even those who had a glimpse of him for the first time, without any preconceived notion. The young M. R. Jayakar, later a legal luminary and politician-compatriot of C. R. Das, who attended the Calcutta session of the National Congress in 1906, reminisces:

I then had my first opportunity of observing from close quarters the Congress leaders of those times with some of whom my contact increased later. I then saw Aurobindo Ghose and his associates. What struck me were his great earnestness and dignified appearance. He had not then developed, so far as outside appearance could show, into a complete Yogi, but I got, from a distance, an indication that his political philosophy was different from that of those who surrounded him.<sup>5</sup>

Jayakar, though a seasoned rationalist, was after all an inspired patriot and we can say, for the sake of argument, that his own imagination could have coloured his impression, at least partially. But here is a most pleasantly surprising revelation made by one of the foremost Indian educationists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. (Sir) C. R. Reddy, then the Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University, in the course of his bestowing on Sri Aurobindo (in absentia) the 1<sup>st</sup> C. Ramalinga Reddy National Prize instituted by his University (an honour that was never given to anybody else). Dr. Reddy, a Cambridge alumni like Sri Aurobindo who had succeeded the latter as the Vice-Principal of the Baroda College, narrates the impression of someone who had no particular reason to nurture any idealistic impression of Sri Aurobindo:

Mr. A. B. Clark, the Principal of the Baroda College, remarked to me, “So, you met Aurobindo. Did you notice his eyes? There is mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond.” And he added, “If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions.”

Clark was a materialist of materialists. I have never been able to understand how that worldly but delightful person could have glimpsed the truth, then latent, about Aurobindo. But then does not the lightning’s blinding flash, which lasts but a moment, leap forth from the dark black bosom of the cloud?<sup>6</sup>

But there are far more astounding accounts of the serene and shy ‘Aurobindo’ of those days who never made a claim to any spiritual status, inspiring in his young admirers an attitude of reverence that is inexplicable. Records Nolinikanta Sarkar, the noted Bengali writer, that in a meeting in South Kolkata to celebrate the birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo in 1952, he was surprised to see that the Sankaracharya of Sri Sharada Peetham — one of the four Muths founded by the Adi Sankaracharya — was the chief guest. Sarkar was intrigued. The Sankaracharyas of these major Muths were invariably exclusive exponents of Mayavada, the doctrine of Illusionism. How was he expected to speak anything appropriate for such an occasion? Doesn’t Sri Aurobindo’s vision of creation and its reality, of human evolution and its culmination, demolish Mayavada’s claim to absolute truth?

Here is a literal translation of Sarkar’s reminiscences in Bengali:

Soon Sankaracharya Maharaj arrived at the venue, an ascetic rather short in stature, the holy staff in hand. He was accompanied by three or four ascetic followers and some householder devotees. Kamal Chandra Mahashay received him with respect and ushered him into the assembly. We too stood up and greeted him.

He relaxed for a few minutes and began. I cannot reproduce what he said word by word. I narrate whatever I remember. He said:

“It was nineteen hundred and eight. I was then a student. I was in Maharashtra. We the young ones were followers of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Our political life flourished under his influence . . . You can gauge the depth of our devotion to Sri Aurobindo from one example. We used to read the Gita regularly. In the *Srimadbhagavat Gita* wherever there was the phrase Thus spake God, we replaced it with Thus spake Aurobindo. That was how we saw Sri Aurobindo.”<sup>7</sup>

If the feelings of this young revolutionary and his compatriots towards Sri Aurobindo of Kolkata days had found such a spontaneously radical expression, in so many others it was no less overwhelming though subdued. Let us look at one more memoir, translated from Bengali:



I was not only charmed at my first meeting with him, but also grew stronger. I understood in a concrete way that one could be initiated at the very sight of the Guru, without even a touch or a Mantra.

My friend Upendranath (Bandopadhyay) left me near Aurobindo and went away. I sat wonder-struck gazing at his face. I forgot even to offer a Namaskar to him. The peaceful, self-realised, Vedantic figure opened up a new universe before me — my entire heart was filled with light and delight. I do not know what one feels when one obtains Darshan of the Divine, but at the Darshan of Aurobindo my mind and life were charged with the warmth of a new spirit. I wondered if I had ever met such a person before.<sup>8</sup>

There are a number of testimonies of those who had come in contact with Sri Aurobindo in his pre-Pondicherry days telling us that he was indeed special and unique, not akin to the rest of his contemporaries, a person in whom unimaginable humility and profundity of wisdom existed as a single natural characteristic. But all that could not be viewed as a prelude to the role he was to play in the history of consciousness. What needs to be emphasised is that he was, by any measuring rod, an inexplicable phenomenon. Quite independent of his later day stature, he would have been a god to many of those who knew him in his pre-Pondicherry days. A hagiography, as the word is ordinarily understood today, is a biography in which the author idealises his subject. But I do not know the right word for a biography where the author records, quite objectively, the impressions and experiences of others for whom the subject indeed had proved to be their supreme ideal. If this too is hagiography, then the word certainly deserves greater respectability. The issue is, whether or not we believe in the reality of consciousness much higher than the average, even higher than that of what we call a genius or a super-genius, not limited by what we in our wisdom have decided as laws of psychology governing the human personality, manifesting among us. If facts lead us to accept that reality, it matters little what term we use to describe the account of such a consciousness.

This biography, like the preceding ones, intends to present Sri Aurobindo's perceptible and external life based on facts available to this author till date with the help of some of his dedicated researcher friends. Whenever it becomes unavoidable to refer to Sri Aurobindo's Yogic experiences, these will be presented through the Master's own words or those of the Mother. It will be otherwise impossible for any biographer to focus on his adventures in consciousness as the Mahayogi of later years, or even the quiet Yogic pursuit he had begun during his Baroda (Vadodara) days.

A question that inevitably arises is, if the Mahayogi is the real Sri Aurobindo why at all describe the façade of his life that may not reveal the real? The only answer is a sense of *Shraddha*, a feeling of wonder that such a character moved among men not long ago and the inevitable consequence of that feeling — a renewed



faith in mankind, for there were so many in the society of that time who could recognise what was gloriously extraordinary. The Mother's jotting in her diary after meeting Sri Aurobindo on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 1914,

It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, he whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth

is a revelation at a different plane — a revelation of the mighty for the mighty.

I am struck by the phenomenon that was 'Pre-Pondicherry' Sri Aurobindo in the eyes and experience of the least prepared, the fact that for them he appeared as the "hundred-petalled Aurobindo (lotus) in India's Manasarovar"<sup>9</sup> or as "God-like Aurobindo"<sup>10</sup> and also the fact that he puzzled his foes because he was "treated with the reverence of a king wherever he had gone",<sup>11</sup> even if we view the Sankaracharya's attitude as that of the few who possessed some exclusive faculty.

This biography will present in subsequent chapters glimpses of this delightfully puzzling phenomenon whenever warranted, derived from sources mostly in Bengali, not much of which had so far been available in English — this last aspect being one of the reasons for this exercise.

At the calendric plane Sri Aurobindo's life can be broadly divided into two phases: Pre-Pondicherry days and Pondicherry days. To elucidate my point of view I take the liberty of reproducing, in a slightly modified form, a portion of what I said in an interview conducted by Prof. P. Raja for *The Hindu*, on the occasion of the Centenary of Sri Aurobindo's Arrival in Pondicherry, the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2010:

*Q:* Often people, overwhelmed by Sri Aurobindo's greatness, ask, "How could one achieve so much in a single life? He inspired India's struggle for freedom and was its most powerful leader for the brief period that he was in national politics. What made him wake up to his inner Divinity so that he suddenly broke away from the sort of life he led and came over to Pondicherry? What was the immediate occasion?"

*Ans:* To articulate an answer to this question is practically beyond me, even though it is no riddle for me. Sri Aurobindo for me, as much as for many others, is the Divine Sri Aurobindo; it is not possible to visualise a pre-Divine Sri Aurobindo. But this cannot be my answer to the seeker in those who put the question nor can I overlook the sincerity behind the query. After all, Sri Aurobindo himself had answered it at the so-called factual plane in his *Tales of Prison Life* as well as in the *Uttarpara Speech*.

*Q:* Will you please state it in your own words?

*Ans:* I'll try. But even if one were to use his own words, it would still need

a preface and this is how I would put it. Let us put aside the case of Sri Aurobindo for a moment. Even in the lives of average people like us no transition from the usual pattern of life into the life of a spiritual seeker need take place suddenly. A quest for Truth continues deep within us, even though we may not be aware of it. At a certain degree of its development, any external event or influence could inspire us to break away from the pattern of life we followed and that break may appear sudden.

But no such formula, of course, applies to the Avatar. Let me put the situation in a metaphorical way. You may decide to wake up at a certain hour of the night and set the alarm in your clock accordingly and go to sleep. Even when the alarm goes off and you wake up, it may take you a few seconds to recollect that it had been your own doing, a result of your own decision to go to sleep and then to wake up at a certain time.

This is how I see the so-called transition in the life of Sri Aurobindo, for he had to, at least symbolically, plunge into the self-forgetfulness of humanity. He had to identify himself with humanity and experience all its limitations. His incarceration at the Alipore prison served as his own alarm. As is well-known, he was embraced by Sri Krishna in such a way that he saw none but the Lord in everything and all — in the walls that deprived him of his freedom, in the lawyers who pleaded for him as well as against him, and in the judge, the witnesses and so on.

He was different and great even before that. Surprising his guide Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, he achieved Yogic experiences of such great magnitude in a day or two that would have taken a long time for a normal Yogi to achieve.

But this difference was only the preface to the difference that was to emerge before long.

In the gloomy and suffocating solitary cell where, as he recollected in his *Tales of Prison Life*, “bound to the wheels of an iron law, subservient to the whim of others, one had to live deprived of every other contact”, he woke up to the fact that “God was playing a game” with him. In his famous *Uttarpara Speech* he made explicit the Providential purpose behind his travail: he had indescribable realisations in a few days, the total and intimate identification with the Divine — in other words he woke up to his own identity, his *swarupa* — that would ultimately lead him to give us a glimpse of the evolutionary future of man, the message of the Life Divine.

*Q:* So, the break from the life as he led it was obvious!

*Ans:* Obvious, is it? But what is not obvious is that there was really no break! Do I sound enigmatic? It is like this. His struggle for liberation continued. The first phase of his life was devoted to the liberation of the motherland. India for him was not simply a stretch of inanimate earth, but a consciousness, a living heritage of human aspiration through the ages, towards liberation of

human souls from their bondage to ignorance. At Pondicherry began the second phase of his struggle for liberation — the emancipation of man from that primeval bondage.

*Q:* Right. But is there any difference between the liberation sought by great spiritual masters of the past and Sri Aurobindo?

*Ans:* A radical difference indeed. Great souls sought liberation for themselves. There was nothing wrong in that. No doubt, they inspired and guided hundreds or thousands of others to take to that path. But they sought liberation, realisation or Nirvana, not divinisation or integral transformation of man into divinity — a goal that Sri Aurobindo's Yoga aims at, a transcendence of mankind as a whole that would be made possible by the intervention of a new consciousness descending from the Supreme. He did his Yoga to bring down that force which he termed the Supermind. The Mother continued the process when he left his body on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1950. This new consciousness is at work in the atmosphere of the earth, probably waiting for its chance to manifest when there would be a sufficiently strong collective aspiration.

*Q:* "All earth shall be the Spirit's manifest home" as he said in his epic *Savitri*?

*Ans:* That's right. He rejected the widely prevailing notion that the world and the worldly life were illusions — though he did not deny the fact that we remain blinded by a plethora of illusory values. But Providence did not create this world for it to be merely abandoned as false. It is intrinsically divine and so is our life. It is not renunciation of life, but the transformation of life, freedom from the octopus hold of unconsciousness — that is the evolutionary goal beckoning man.

As I had stated earlier, there was no phase of Sri Aurobindo's life I could describe as pre-Divine, for his entire life was a preparation and then an offering, a *Yajna*, on behalf of the earth, for the realisation of the prospect concealed in our destiny, a liberated future.

That we cannot describe any phase of Sri Aurobindo's life as pre-Divine is corroborated by his life-long lieutenant Nolini Kanta Gupta in these words:

. . . the Yogi, the Divine, the impersonal man in Sri Aurobindo was the real person always there from the very birth. Thus we see him starting life exactly with the thing where everyone ends. In his inner being he had not to pass through the gradations that lead an ordinary person gradually towards the widening ranges of consciousness and existence. In all the stations of his life, in every sphere and status Sri Aurobindo was doing his duties — that is, his work — *kartavyam karma* — selflessly, which means with no sense of self, or

perhaps we should say with supreme selfhoodness; for such is the character, the very nature of the born Yogi, the God-man.<sup>12</sup>

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

## References and Notes

1. R. Palit: *Life of Aravinda Ghose*, Panchanantala Road, Howrah, 1911.

The book deals mostly with the philosophy of nationalism, religion etc. and traces the ancestry of Sri Aurobindo with a focus on his maternal grandfather the celebrated Raj Narain Bose. What is important to note is the author must have started writing the book soon after Sri Aurobindo left Kolkata. Hence his description of his subject naturally reflects the general impression his contemporaries had of Sri Aurobindo of Pre-Pondicherry days. An extract: "His purity, his sympathy, his benevolence, his Job-like endurance, and above all, his invincible determination charmed and fascinated all who came in contact with him. There is an indescribable attraction in his very look, which has done more to secure friendship and to gain followers, than years of acquaintance could do with other men."

The author wrote in conclusion: "In darkness, and in storm, on the raging waves, and under bursting clouds let each man do his work and leave the rest to God. A life like that of Aravinda will serve as a beacon light. Sorrow has its lessons, its triumphs and its joys. A life nursed on the lap of sorrows has more lessons to teach than the pampered life of luxury. His life presents a model unsurpassed in the whole history of Patriotism, and we can do no more to show our love to the country than to follow his examples in life."

2. Two of the public figures known for their persuasive style of speech. Mr. Bradlaugh was a close associate of Annie Besant.

3. Manoj Das: *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Century* (1972), (Reprinted 2003 as *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*) Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

4. Jyotish Chandra Ghosh (1883–1971), scholar and professor, popularly known as *Master Mashay*, underwent 20 years of incarceration for his anti-colonial activities, a part of which he spent along with Subhas Chandra Bose at Mandalay jail. He was the President of the Forward Bloc, Bengal, as well as a legislator. The extract is from his only known book, *Life-Work of Aurobindo*, Atmashakti Library, Calcutta, 1929.

5. M. R. Jayakar: *The Story of My Life*, Vol. 1, Bombay (Mumbai) 1959.

6. Dr. C. R. Reddy: Convocation Address, Andhra University, 1948.

7. Nolinikanta Sarkar: *Jawa Asar Majhkhane*, Vol. 1 (Bengali); Mitra & Ghosh, Kolkata.

8. *Sri Aurobindo Smriti* (Bengali), edited by Bishwanath Dey; Sahityam, Calcutta.

9. Brahmabandhav Upadhyay in his magazine *Sandhya* (Bengali).

10. *The Basumati* (Bengali) of 15 May 1909.

11. Norton, the Prosecution lawyer on 17 March, the 144<sup>th</sup> day of the Alipore Conspiracy Case trial.

12. Sisir Kumar Mitra: *Sri Aurobindo*, Indian Book Co., New Delhi, 1972.

## CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

*(Continued from the issue of January 2011)*

**Saturday, 4 September 1926**

*This week has not been as favourable as the last one. And it is a curious fact, for last week I was very busy outside, but when I came home I entered easily into meditation; body, vital and mind submitted to it. It may be that I am now going through the consequences of the disturbance, consequences which did not appear at first. My body is slothful, my mind is restless. So there is not much to say.*

*What is the reason that progress is always made by fits and starts, never straightforwardly?*

It is always so. Different movements enter into play at different times — the important thing is to discern from where they come. And the most obstinate movements always recur until they are completely transformed.

*You spoke of two ways — one direct to the supermind through the mind, the other by the opening of the psychic being. Are they really two different paths? And what are their characteristics?*

Yes, there are two movements. Sometimes the mind opens first to the Light, and the supermind works then through the mind and uses the machinery of mind. Sometimes the psychic being, which is always behind — without a psychic aspiration nothing in this Yoga is possible — comes forward. There is then no mental illumination, but a burning fire which turns the whole being upwards. It makes the progress easy. Afterwards, of course, the whole machinery of one's nature is directed from above, but the mental movement is not the chief one.

*What is the nature of Carpenter's illumination?<sup>1</sup>*

It is difficult to say; I don't know him.

*But judging from his writing?*

1. Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), English writer and social reformer. His later works express a certain perception of the unity of all existence.

It does not indicate much — it may be only an awakening of the intuitive mind.

*Sometimes my aspiration is very intense, but when the mind resumes again its working, it covers it up to some extent.*

The mind must remain, but it must be transformed. And so also with the vital and the physical. They must completely surrender themselves and not accept only the pressure which is put on them by the mind.

*This I understand now. From my experience with the Theosophists, I can say that they try only to overrule the lower bodies by the mind, but never try to go into these levels and transform them. I understand that the consciousness of these planes must yield to the higher Light and accept by itself the transformation.*

*I suppose that in my case I am following the way through the mind.*

Yes, the mental movement is predominant. That is why it is slow.

*(Smiling) But it does not mean unfitness!*

Not at all. There are always difficulties in each case — for instance when the vital and the physical are opening, everything that is concealed there comes out.

*In my case the central acceptance is done, and I think that even the vital and physical accept the change.*

But the question is whether they accept it by themselves or on account of the pressure put upon them by the mind.

*That I don't know.*

*Now, will you tell me something about the photos?*

Not very favourable.

... ? ...

She is a vital woman. She moves only on the vital plane.

*I knew that. But is there nothing psychic about her?*

I don't see anything. Mental aspiration there may be, but it is not sufficient. I may say that she is not safe in the spiritual life.

*But won't a time come when she will open to something higher?*

What do you mean by "a time"?

*I mean in this life.*

Everything is possible. It would rather be a miracle.

*There is something curious. They could have come here. They had the opportunity of doing so. She went back to Europe and on the way landed at Colombo, but did not come here. He is now returning from the Far-East, but is going through Siberia.*

I don't know much about him, but she is not intended for this place.

*Then is it better not to try to bring them to this Yoga?*

Yes, you should leave them to follow their own path.

\* \* \*

### **Saturday, 11 September 1926**

*In meditation I feel myself distinct from the mind. I can see my mind working, but the curious thing is that my mind seems to remain connected with the body and I watch it from outside. I see from outside the form-building mind, the speaking mind, and when sounds come from outside they seem to happen inside that mind. But all this is in the body, so to say, and I am in front of my body, looking at it, not from above.*

*When the Force comes down, it has a dissolving power over the mental formations. I can now use this power by placing before the Force the mental formations I want to get rid of. This power liberates me and I feel a sensation akin to floating. I never go above, but forward — and I never succeed in cutting all connection with the active mind and moving freely on my own plane.*

It is not the usual movement. Generally one goes above the body or finds some wideness where there is no location of consciousness.

*I don't feel this wideness. Of course I cannot be very positive about the location of my consciousness. As soon as I try to think of this location in space, I find myself again in the body. Is this movement to be encouraged?*

I suppose it is a movement on the mental plane, but we have to see.

*As I said, I am conscious of the dissolving power of the Force coming from above. It goes down to the navel centre and works from there. I cannot say yet how it works, but at times a sense of vital power rises.*

*I am fully conscious from above of vital movements rising. For instance, a movement of pride rises — it comes from the navel — and I realise it as distinct from myself. But what shall I do with it? Up to the present time I have merely tried to force it down and bar its coming into the conscious field. But I think it is not right.*

No. That is what people ordinarily do, but it simply suppresses the vital movements. You have to call down the same power that dissolves the mental formations and apply it to open the vital. You have to watch and understand the movements, see how they rise, what supports them in your nature. A full understanding of this is necessary.

*I did so instinctively. And I offer these movements, impure as they may be, to the Divine, that he may transform them.*

*The Mother told me yesterday that the awakening of the psychic in me depended much upon my attitude. Can you tell me something more about this attitude?*

She did not say anything else?

No.

It is difficult to say. (Silence)

This attitude can only become permanent when the mental is no longer the prominent factor in life. It all comes to the same thing — you have to rely upon the Power that comes from above and realise that it is something more than a power.

*The Divine as personality?*

We are always using mental words that mislead. Yes, it is true that this Power is the support of all personality. The Vedantic standpoint of the impersonal Absolute, which has spread so much in recent years, is only one aspect of the Truth. It applies



very much to the mind, especially to the modern mind, but when the consciousness rises above the mind, it is clearly seen as a partial aspect of the Truth. The Power has personality as a Guna. It uses the impersonal to rise above the limited egoism of our personalities. The impersonal view of the Divine is somewhat larger than our personal conception, which is limited by our mind; it is the mind that limits personality. But the Power has an existence above mind. You have to recognise that the Power is not a mere power.

*It is true that, for the present, I only see it as a working power.*

Because you are always in the mind. But when the psychic opens, you cannot retain this standpoint — it becomes too vivid and too real.

*Have I to rise into the supermind for that?*

The psychic opening will raise you to that.

*Before coming here, I stuck to the Vedantic idea of impersonality and even now I cannot realise with the mind what is truly meant by divine personality. How can the mind take the right attitude?*

It can call for it. When it gets a glimpse of it, it will more easily put itself in the right movement.

*Last night I had a dream. I was with others, probably sadhaks, and the Mother was there. I was given a book. This book was written in French, but in a purely phonetic way, not taking into account the orthographic rules. Even some new phonetic signs were used. It was new to me and somehow I had the idea it was written by you, the Mother and P.R. I could not understand anything of it. Looking through the book I noticed some misprints. I showed them to the Mother who said, "It is strange. I took so much care to have it corrected before having it printed." I also asked for some information from you, who were in the adjoining room. You answered me in Sanskrit, which I could not understand. I went towards you. You were in bed and, as far as I remember, taking breakfast. I bowed to you with very deep feelings of devotion and aspiration and remained prostrated for some time with a blank mind. Then you touched me with your hand and I underwent a change of consciousness, of which I don't remember anything. After some time my consciousness came down again. You kissed me twice and I departed with very high feelings. The vividness of the dream and the strength of the feelings surprised me. I awoke; it was half past two.*

Regarding the book, I don't see the meaning very well. It may have been something from the past. Something probably took place on the vital plane, and it is not always easy to interpret.

*But did I come into your presence?*

Not in the physical. Some vital happening occurred and that is why you saw me in such a way.

*Why was it so vivid?*

Once you enter the mental and vital planes, they are as real as the physical.

*Perhaps some mixture came from my mind with regard to the book. But the last part was of a different character.*

*(Later I related the dream to the Mother. She commented:)*

This is not surprising. We spoke of you several times during the day yesterday in connection with the difficulties of the Western mind. Even yesterday evening, we talked about what happened in you during the evening gathering, of which you may not be conscious. Also it is not surprising that there was some thought on his part about you. And when I spoke with you yesterday, there was aspiration on your part too. So much the better; this shows that the time is drawing near when you will be able to receive the Light. Keep what you have received.

\* \* \*

## **Tuesday, 14 September 1926**

*(The Mother spoke with A.G. about my difficulties in meditation. Today she took me aside and we meditated together for half an hour, at 4.30 p.m. The Force collected above my head, then descended, particularly to the level of the mind, and tried to open the mind. Outer thoughts were kept at a distance, though they tried to penetrate. The day was not particularly well chosen, for I had been meditating with difficulty for some days. Later, after hearing what I felt, the Mother told me:)*

Yes, the Force descended. It went right down to your feet, but in the lower regions it was rather outside than within.

At the beginning you had a very strong aspiration; then something must have disturbed you. But all the time there was a peaceful and calm aspiration. You have a power of aspiration, but it has been almost completely stifled by the mind.

The Force that descended at first was a force of wisdom, of pure knowledge; it descended to the level of the solar plexus. Then there was a sort of command to open the mind. There was an opening, which had a geometrical form — a triangle — and within, a sort of representation of the idea you have formed of the Divine.

A force of calm, a silence, descended afterwards. You say you did not feel it, yet it was there and perhaps you will feel it soon. Much more descended than what you are aware of now, but it is not lost for the subconscious and it will be gradually realised. There is in you a great capacity for calmness, which may serve as a useful base for a subsequent descent and manifestation. Anyway, in that calmness there was Ananda.

There was some response in the lower centres, but the response was weak and mostly recorded by the subconscious.

In short, I do not think it will take very long now. There is a certain rigidity in the mind, but that is common to all Westerners.

*Did the Force descend as far as the vital plane?*

Yes, of course, even into the physical, but outside you rather than within.

*There is certainly a great difference from my ordinary meditations. Now I feel, perhaps more than during the meditation, that there is something quite close which descended.*

\* \* \*

**Saturday, 18 September 1926**

*The Mother must have told you about our meditation of last Tuesday. After the meditation I felt very deeply the presence of a great calm Force which was behind me. It did not enter my consciousness, but I felt it nevertheless backing me.*

*When in meditation, the divine Force comes down readily. It works through the navel centre on the vital and also, it seems, on the physical. There is not any powerful vibration of the lowest centre, but I feel as if a force were expanding in the physical itself. It seems to me quite distinct from the vital.*

You say it expands?

*I would rather say it permeates the subtle-physical part of the body. But I am not perfectly sure of it. Let us wait and see.*

*Behind the chest centre, which is always very active, I feel the presence of something and from there my aspiration rises and unites with the Force coming down. I see a kind of connecting line between this centre and the top of the head. It is a straight line. Is there anything like that?*

It means that your psychic aspiration is rising and calling the Force down. A connection has been formed. In the end all the centres will be connected in that way.

*My mind is still active on the old lines. How is it that it does not stop?*

The old habit is recurring! But it does not matter much as long as the aspiration is able to bring down the Force. The mind by itself cannot do much; the Force that comes from the Divine is more powerful.

*Now I will be more busy outside with this new work in the archives. I hope it will not disturb me.*

It is not an absorbing work, is it?

*Of course not. As soon as it is over, I forget all about it. But it seems that the work that best suits me is teaching. As regards teaching in the college, the Governor has met an opposition in Mr. V, the director.*

He is completely in the hands of the priests.

*I hope in time to get something there. It would suit me better than the present work.*

\* \* \*

## **Saturday, 25 September 1926**

*Meditation has become easier; it is more substantial, more vivid. Up to now it has always been hard and difficult, a pressure exerted by the mind. Now a certain interest is found in meditation itself.*

It has become more vivid because the vital is opening.

*The principal thing is that the Force is coming down into the physical. It is felt by the physical consciousness and the pressure acts especially on the centres of the knees and legs. The pressure is so strong that I now lie down during meditation. At certain times I feel a pressure above and behind me. It is not a one-pointed pressure (it is not a single point of consciousness) but I feel it, I touch it, so to say, not only in relation to the head centre but also the heart centre. What this pressure is I don't know. It is formless, but it gives me a strong feeling of peace, calm and bliss. My feelings are also aroused. What is it?*

(Smiling) You have to wait and see what is beginning to manifest itself. Do you feel it especially at meditation time?

*Yes. But when I turn my inner awareness towards it, I can also feel it at other times. There is nothing else to say.*

(To be continued)

PAVITRA

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

The French text and the English translation first appeared in the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* starting in 1969.]

*Ordinarily, in their task of assumption and assimilation of this difficult stuff of Nature, the higher powers descend first into the mind and occupy the mind-centres because these are nearest to themselves in intelligence and knowledge-power; if they descend first into the heart or into the vital being of force and sensation, as they sometimes do because these happen to be in some individuals more open and call them first, the results are more mixed and dubious, imperfect and insecure than if things happen in the logical order.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 958)

# ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

## Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

*(Continued from the issue of January 2011)*

### Chapter Eleven

#### The War Years

*While the Ashram could be said to be unaffected by the economic crisis of the 1930s, it was not the same as regards the Second World War. Since 1934, Philippe had been feeling that he was going to be called up for military service and had asked his mother to send him accessories of his uniform. He was to join duty in Indo-China, but, fortunately for him, the ship which was to take him never arrived at Pondicherry: thus he escaped the surrender to the Japanese, followed by detention or execution.*

*His rank of captain (as a reserve) made him the highest ranking officer in the military hierarchy of the colony; although he had not been formally mobilised, the Governor, isolated from the metropolis and caught up in an Anglo-Saxon universe at war, depended more and more on him for the tasks of civil administration.*

*The bombing of Calcutta by Japanese airplanes led to an exodus from the Bay of Bengal towards the West and the South of India; the majority of many members of the Ashram being — like Sri Aurobindo — Bengalis, the population of the community now grew to four hundred. The administrative problems increased and new needs surfaced, like the education of the children who had been given shelter: thence the beginning of the Ashram School.*

*It must be borne in mind that for six years Philippe was totally separated from his family. During this long period, neither he nor his family could exchange either ideas or news. When it became possible once more, the orientation of his life was final: he was, in fact more than fifty years old and his parents could no longer cherish the hope of a still-reparable error of youth. His life was irrevocably in India!*

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, September 1, 1934

My dear Parents,

I do not know where you will receive this letter, probably in Saint-Gervais or perhaps in a spa town.

I am pained by what Maman tells me about Papa's health. He must not resign himself to the idea that he is getting old; it is wrong, he is not as old as all that and he has kept himself quite fit. Thought has much more power over the body than one imagines and one is only as old as one thinks oneself to be.

Yes, everywhere one complains about quirks of the weather. There are floods in Poland, whereas in England there is severe drought! Was it always like that and one knew nothing about it due to the lack of communication or is it that the human disharmony has its counterpart in natural imbalance? Mystery! Mystery! Not that I would like to suggest, as does Gandhi, that the recent earthquake in India was a retribution for the sin that India has committed by creating the untouchables (Gandhi is, decidedly, more Christian than Hindu), which is rather too simplistic, not to say more.

Here, we have had very good weather this year, not too hot, and now the temperature is dropping. My friend from Franche-Comté finds the climate wonderful.

Maman, when you return to Paris, may I ask you, for my fawn leather belt (the one I am wearing as officer in the photo taken after the war) and my Captain's sword (not my 'Polytechnician's sword) of course, if you find them. I do not know what has happened to them but they must be there somewhere. It could be that I may need them as Officer in Reserve and it will save me from buying new ones. Also, if you find my flute, I request you to put it in the parcel; it is of no use there. These could very easily be sent by parcel post.

From what I see, the family is prolific and increases endlessly. I would not recognise myself among all the cousins and second cousins. You must not expect the same from us, from Albert and me: we shall bring the family average to a acceptable average . . . However Albert has not said his last word and will perhaps accept the call, belated but real, for family life.

I think often of you, and today, I embrace all three of you very lovingly.

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, December 5, 1934

My dear Parents,

I was pleasantly surprised on receiving Albert's letter telling me about his engagement; I say "pleasant" because I was very pleased with the photographs he has sent me and everything that he tells me in his letter confirms my impression. I cannot but approve of his choice and congratulate him wholeheartedly. Evidently, there is the difference of age; perhaps that will become important in a dozen years, but my future sister-in-law is no birdbrain and seems to be serious and thoughtful!

In short, I am very happy for Albert, and for you too. Maman was unhappy at the thought of Albert remaining an old bachelor and also . . . of not seeing her grandchildren. And I am sure you will like Denise.

Albert tells me that the wedding is fixed for January 19. I shall not be with you, but I would not like my absence to sadden you. I share your joy and send Albert and his wife my most sincere wishes.

As I do not possess anything of my own, it is not possible for me to give the newlyweds the gift that I would have great pleasure to give them if I had remained in the world. I have expressed it very frankly to Albert; he will understand me. From this point of view, the situation is the same as if I had entered the Catholic orders, it is therefore not strange to the Western mind.

This letter will reach you around the end of the year festivities. As always, my thoughts will always be with you and will bring you all my love. I wish that the New Year which begins with a happy event, will be favourable for you and bring you the peace of a profound harmony.

I embrace you very affectionately,

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

P.S. I hope to receive other photographs. My letter to Albert has gone by airmail to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré address, which I think is his personal address.

\* \* \*



Pondicherry, March 29, 1935

Very dear Parents,

I have not received news of Albert's marriage. I had expected to receive a photograph of all of you taken on this occasion. I very much liked the small photos of the two of you that Maman has sent me; I looked at them with much love and care using a magnifying glass. I find that both of you have an extraordinarily youthful look. I have shown these photos to Madame Alfassa and Sri Aurobindo who have made the same remark. Madame Alfassa, whom we call "Mother" here, is the one who is in charge of the spiritual and material guidance of the Ashram. Her brother, 'Polytechnician', is Governor in the colonies; she has a son, also a 'Polytechnician', of about Albert's age.

I am sending you a photo taken in December; it gives me a gloomy expression, which is not the real me. The other three persons are also Sri Aurobindo's disciples: the one on the left is a Bengali writer and poet, next to him is a former member of the Indian Congress who was the leader of the nationalist party of Bengal, and to the extreme right is an Englishman, a retired professor of philosophy. I am attaching another, a little older photo which perhaps I have already sent you.

I hope that Albert and Denise have had a good journey and are happy. Denise wrote me a very sweet letter a little before the wedding and I replied to her immediately. I hope that my letter has reached her, but it must have followed them in their travel, and I would like to know for certain.

What is Albert's address? Is it 214, Faubourg Saint-Honoré? Or have they moved since their marriage? I think their honeymoon must have been very happy because they have not even sent me a postcard during their entire travel!

In Pondicherry, we have had a wonderful winter; the temperature has begun to rise a little, but it is still very pleasant.

In the Ashram, nothing new, apart from the incidents which form the fabric of our spiritual life. I am keeping well.

I hope that you too are in good health and that the winter has been favourable to you. The photos of all of you always give me great joy.

I embrace you lovingly and ask you to embrace Denise and Albert.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, November 3, 1936

My dear Parents,

Maurice Magre has just published a book in which a whole portion is devoted to the Ashram. The title is *A la poursuite de la Sagesse* (Fasquelle). He has described the impressions of the visit he paid us around this time last year. The Ashram is seen through the eyes of a poet and through his sensitivity which is vivid and clear, but a little sad and troubled. I am sure that you will be interested to read it because this book is of a rare and moving beauty, although in my opinion, imbued with too pessimistic a nostalgia.

A few lines are about me (pages 105 and 106). You would not have recognised me, for sure!<sup>1</sup>

Affectionately I embrace you,

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, December 6, 1936

My dear Parents,

Denise has sent me some photographs taken this summer and I was happy to see you too there. You have hardly changed and I find you just as I know you. I congratulate you for it and wish with all my heart that you maintain this astonishing youth of body and of spirit.

From a few sentences of Papa's last letter, I see that he adapts himself better than most people to the social evolution (he calls it revolution) taking place. Is it not a fine proof of the opening of the spirit and of optimism while so many letters from France show disarray and fear!

One hears much that (for France) the month of January will be decisive (?) for the balance of power in France and in Europe. But people say so many things . . .

Have you read *Les Hommes de bonne volonté*? I am a great admirer of Jules Romains, as much for his stylistic talent as for his genius as for his psychological perceptiveness. In his books there are truly remarkable things about the movements of the forces which preceded the War of 1914. And one would immediately like to have the volumes which he will devote to the contemporary period, if he goes so far.

1. See 'The Ashram at Pondicherry' in the June and July 2005 issues of Mother India for an English translation of the passage on the Ashram from the book by Maurice Magre. —Ed. Note

But there is much to be said on the problems of this magnitude. Let us deal with our little selves. As for me, I am very well and pursuing my work — a work which is not always easy — in the midst of calm and harmonious conditions, the best, perhaps, that can be found on the earth at this moment!

Often I think of you and I shall do so particularly at the time of the New Year. I send you all my best wishes for the New Year, wishes for health, peace and harmony, and I embrace the two of you very lovingly.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

P.S. It gives me great pleasure to find a little corner of La Minelle in one of these photos; I would have liked to see a little more of it.

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, March 15, 1937

My dear Parents,

Here we are already in the month of March; time passes so fast that the months seem to be weeks. Since long I wanted to tell you how happy I was to receive your affectionate letter exactly on the first of January.

About myself, I do not have much to tell you except that I am well and am very busy.

This winter we have had some French visitors to the Ashram. One of them, Jean Herbert, of Albert's age, is a very serious and interesting man. He works a lot for the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation. I thought that this would interest Albert, and perhaps you too, to meet him, because he can tell you a little about me and the Ashram where he has stayed for two months. So I have given him Albert's address, asking him to go and see him on his return to France. He will be in Paris in June, I think, because he travels a lot. Please inform Albert about it.

I hope that you have had a calm and pleasant winter, and that you, Albert and his family, are all in good health.

I embrace you very lovingly.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, December 4, 1937

My dear Parents,

I would have been perfectly happy to receive Papa's airmail letter if it had not brought me the news of your unfortunate illnesses. Thinking of you, I was always very pleased that you were so courageous and strong, apart from the small problems and Maman's physiological troubles, and I was happy to know that you led an active and interesting life. But once this bad period passes, there is no reason why you should not resume your former activities. These exotic fevers, dengue, etc., — one need not go to Malta or the colonies to catch them, it seems! — make one extremely weak, but one generally recovers from them quite well.

If I understand right, is it at La Minelle that both of you were taken ill? How did the Maltese fever travel there? Could it not be from the cattle, the sheep, that you caught this fever? There is one variety of it (recurring fever or brucellosis, I think) which transmits itself in this manner and it is only recently that it has been diagnosed.

Whatever it may be, I hope that both of you will recover completely. It seems to me that the moment you do not feel old in spirit, there is no reason for your body to be old. But one must be careful not to listen to insidious suggestions regarding age, disease etc. You are, no doubt, right to accuse the doctors as much as the disease, there is nothing so contrary to real health as the medical turn of mind! It is difficult to free oneself from that. In our yoga, we are obliged to fight constantly against the collective suggestions which have entered the body consciousness and the subconscious (by education, above all) and which are among the most obstinate obstacles to the transformation which we want to realise.

If one could reject these suggestions completely, I am absolutely sure that the body would live much longer than what is generally accepted. Few are the instances where the body is worn out to the point of total refusal to function.

Why should you feel old? If one has the least contact with one's soul, the deepest inner feeling is that of eternity. It may be that the body is attacked by disease and suffering, it may be that the desires get dulled and the vital energy declines, it may even be that apparently the intellect gets tired and loses its keenness (I say apparently, because it is only that part of the mind which is tied to the body which can thus become weak). But the true being, that which we feel in ourselves as our most intimate "I", that does not change nor age. I assure you that I now consider the "cogito ergo sum" of which the western philosophy is so proud to be a great stupidity. The experience of yoga, — and all those who have practised it sufficiently are unanimous on this point, — shows that we are neither the body, nor the desires, nor the intellect; one can have the experience of **existing** completely independently of them and it is an existence infinitely more vast, more calm, happy and luminous than that which is bound to them. So that to say "I think therefore I

am” seems almost as wrong as to say “I eat, or I walk, therefore I am”; thought is the activity of one part of the being, as eating or walking is the activity of other parts, but that has nothing to do with the existence. It is not a matter of theoretical speculation, nor an empty affirmation, but it is the real lived experience of many people whom I know; it is also my personal experience.

I think that it is a big mistake to consider the spiritual life as an impoverishment. It might have been so with the religious asceticisms which have been the first attempts at the spiritual life and which have opposed it to the worldly life. But it is not a necessity of nature. On the contrary, how much deeper, richer in unsuspected meaning life seems to me now that I catch just a little the Reality which is behind! I wish, my dear Parents, that this Reality, which is above all dogma and all speculation, descends into your heart and your soul, and brings peace and light. Such is the wish that I make for you on the threshold of the New Year. There is none more dear than that in my heart.

I embrace you very lovingly.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

P.S. A letter which I sent to Albert by airmail on September 24, following the birth of his son, has gone astray, because he should have received it long ago. I am very sorry about it and I am writing to him today by the same post.

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, December 9, 1937

My dear Parents,

An airplane of the Indian Postal Service has crashed into the sea near Athens and it is not certain whether all the mail has been saved. I do not think that my letter sent four days back could have been on that plane but as a precaution, I am sending you its duplicate copy.

Yesterday I read in a medical journal a small note on the recurring fever (or brucellosis). It says that it affects above all people who have been in contact with cattle during certain animal epidemics (epizootics) — that could well be the case. It says that the treatment is still not well established. Is it this that you have had? It is a new disease or at least newly labelled.

This letter will reach you long after the New Year. I hope that it will find both

of you recovered fully. It will bring you once again all my good wishes and my most loving thoughts.

I embrace you affectionately.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, January 1, 1938

Very dear Maman,

Albert's airmail letter tells me that you have not yet recovered from the fatigue and the upheaval caused by Papa's illness.

I want to send you this little note to tell you that at the beginning of this New Year, my thoughts will be with you with all the wishes they can form, and above all of calm and quietness. Peace in the mind and in the heart, peace also in the body, in all the organs and even all the cells!

Call the divine force, — it is so near that one does not know that it is there, in the depth of our heart, — and entrust yourself to it; it will calm your tired nerves, heal your wounds and will give you the most merciful gift: that of the divine presence.

Embrace Papa for me. Very affectionately, your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

P.S. Tell Albert that his letter reached me exactly on December 31. All my love to him and Denise.

The photo is a corner of the Ashram, the tallest structure houses our library.

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, September 30, 1939

My dear Parents,

I am still here waiting for my departure by the next ship. It may be towards mid-October, maybe later, because this ship is an old tub, a survivor of the scrapheap, and it is, it seems, badly in need of repairs. It is already late by twenty days and it will probably take even more time.

It has given me time to prepare myself and to organise my replacement. I know,

moreover, that we are not urgently needed in Indo-China, at least not at the moment.

Here is my address over there: Captain B. S. H.

Local Company of Engineers  
Saigon

I do not at all know what they will do with me, not even to which area of the Colony I shall be sent. Perhaps it is better that you continue to write to me here until I inform you about my departure. From here the letters could be re-directed; over there, if I am not there, there is the risk of the letters getting lost.

Nobody in Pondicherry has received any letter from France dated the month of September. I am not surprised at not having received anything either from you or from Albert, but I shall be very happy to get news of you, to know where you are and how you have organised your life, that of Denise and the children.

The news that we receive of France by radio indicates that the war is only in its preparatory phase. What it will be later, with the war in full swing, it is difficult to form an idea of. At present nobody dares to begin aerial bombardments. If it could be maintained, what a lot of unnecessary destruction would be avoided; but, alas, events hardly respond to the wishes that one may make for the future of humanity.

In Pondicherry, one feels far removed from the war. We are not affected, except by some restrictions — quite bearable still — and by the price increase. I suppose that the situation in France must be different.

This is the third war that Papa is witnessing although he would have been quite young in 1870.<sup>2</sup>

I am sorry that Girod — my colleague from the X<sup>th</sup>, an engineer of bridges and causeways — has returned to France. If he were here we would have gone together; he is a nice boy and a man of merit. At present, there is another colleague from the X<sup>th</sup>, younger, an officer of the mobile guard, who is stagnating here and doing everything possible to return to France. He is intelligent, but still a little too young for us to have many points of contact.

This is all that I have to tell you. No doubt you will have more news to give me. You have no reason at all to worry about me.

I think of you and I embrace you very affectionately. Embrace Albert, Denise and the children.

Your son,

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

2. He was then eight years old.

Pondicherry, December 20, 1939

My dear Parents,

In my previous letters I have told you how, after having prepared myself to take the first ship to Indo-China on being mobilised, I was finally kept on deferred call — like the other reserve officers from here. We are now getting ready for mobilisation here itself, to train the local recruits. Probably they are going to create a training centre of which I shall be the commanding officer, and the training will be given under the direction of the active army officers who are here.

For me, it is going to be a big task, a serious responsibility and lots of problems of all sorts. All the same I think it will be interesting and I take it as part of my yogic discipline. Moreover, the whole life may be taken like that. I shall see how I succeed in putting into practice certain inner realisations and in synthesising the most active mystic life with the most active practical life — that of the yogi and that of the military instructor. It is worth the trouble to try it.

I do not know where you are. Papa wanted to return to Paris and perhaps La Minelle did not keep you in winter. All the same I am writing there to you; they will forward it.

We are soon going to enter the New Year. God knows what it has in store for this unfortunate humanity! It seems though that some people are beginning to realise the vanity and the imposture of our so-called civilisation. But how many bitter experiences are needed before the human mind abdicates and accepts the reversal of the values of the spiritual life, before it recognises a higher law, a higher light than its own.

I wish, my dear parents, that you find in yourselves the profound Reality and draw on the supreme comfort, the rest and the quiet at this unique source of peace, joy and light. As the *Upanishad* says: “Having found That, one has no more need of other things.”

My loving thoughts will be with you at the beginning of the year. Please share them with Albert and give Denise my brotherly affection.

I embrace you affectionately.

*Signed:* Philippe

\* \* \*

Pondicherry, March 10, 1945

My dear Parents,

I am still without any news of you and Albert, and do not know what to think. The only explanation of this silence that I can see is that all of you are held up at La



Minelle and that the postal communications between Haute-Saône and the outside world are strictly stopped. But that does not satisfy me. It is true that we cannot, from here, communicate with certain parts of France, of which Haute-Saône is one, but would not the letters addressed to you in Paris be re-directed? And then it seems to me that Albert must have gone to Paris on business and that he would have taken the opportunity to drop a letter in the post box.

I have sent a postcard to Albert at his rue Jean-Nicot address, but I do not know whether he has kept this apartment. As for his villa at Orsay, it seems to me that he had taken it only temporarily. So, apart from La Minelle, where doubtless my letters do not reach and from where yours do not go out, and the Victor Hugo Avenue, where my letters are perhaps collecting without reaching you, I do not have any place where I can try to contact you. I must then be patient.

The registered letters are again being allowed and, seeing there a new opportunity, I am writing to you at once. As the route by sea will take about two months, I am sending a copy by airmail (but without being able to register it, it is not permitted as yet), which will take only a month. From now to then many things can happen in Europe, because the events seem to move fast now. Moreover, they have been developing rapidly since a year, is it not, and we cannot but be happy with the manner in which the last part of the war will have affected our country.

It is true that, here, we are far and have only a general impression. We do not suffer from the material difficulties and do not feel like you the repercussions of all the ordeals endured. We are, I think, quite well informed by the radio, the newspapers, of which some are very good (such as *La France Libre*, from London, which we have received from the beginning), but it is not a personal experience and the imagination is always far from the truth.

How have you lived through these four terrible years? What were your experiences, your activities? On all these points, I am reduced to mere conjectures. Albert's children are now nine and ten years old. I hope that the financial difficulties have not marked their tender age too much.

It sometimes seems to me that it is at La Minelle that you must have sought shelter. But from another point of view, it is a region which must have always been very exposed, and I ask myself where you could have found a refuge.

What has happened to La Minelle? They tell us that the Vosges area had been badly affected. A French lady whom we know and who had a property at Gérardmer has written to us that it no longer exists. But I have not seen anything on the Haute-Saône. The names figured in the communiqués during the advance from the Rhône valley to Belfort. Evidently, Corrès must at some time have been in the war zone. I should be very happy to have the details.

As for me, I am still in the Ashram. The Ashram has grown considerably and now has about 400 permanent members. The maintenance and provisioning of this

community have thrown up a number of new problems. As I have told you, it is the Mother (Madame Alfassa, sister and mother of 'Polytechnicians') who has the charge of the organisation and the management of the Ashram. She always looks after everything and thanks to her, we have not lacked anything. Pondicherry has hardly changed. Apart from the quite sensible restrictions and a general increase in prices, materially the war has touched the colony very little.

Many disciples have come from Bengal with their children, because for a while Bengal was in danger. So much so that we have had to open a school for teaching the children. It is a private school of which I am the director. There are now some sixty children of all ages from five years and more. And as certain subjects are studied by the adults (only members of the Ashram), the school has around eighty students. We have divided them into four classes and the teaching must finally be done in French.

As for me, I have remained a long time on the point of departure. At the mobilisation, I was to enlist and get to Indo-China, like the other reserve officers in Pondicherry. For several months, we waited for the problematic ships. One of them had just crossed the Red Sea and its arrival was imminent. The Governor had even given a farewell dinner in our honour. But the ship, called *The Providence*, broke down and remained under repair in Djibouti, and we unbuckled our trunks. Then the order came to mobilise us on the spot and to establish here a training centre for the reservists of which I was to take command. Everything was ready, and we had even begun to call up the reservists when the armistice was declared. It would have been interesting to begin just at that moment and I was pushing in that direction. But funds were lacking and they stopped everything, while keeping the options open to depart again if the order for it was given. I cannot say anything more about it for fear of rousing the zeal of a scrupulous censor.

Personally, I dissociated myself from the Vichy government since the call given by General de Gaulle and I have been writing to the British authorities on this subject since July 5, 1940. I placed myself officially and voluntarily under orders of General de Gaulle from the time it was possible (September 25, 1940). Since then, I have constantly kept myself at the disposal of the civil and military authorities for any activity that they would judge fit to entrust me with. On several occasions, it seemed that they would call me up for an active military service; but each time the events took a different turn and the only tasks that they gave me were purely civilian: baccalaureate examinations, Management of Electricity, of the Advis . . . . .

*The rest of the letter is missing*

*(To be continued)*

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

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

Our thanks for their kind permission.)

## DETERMINATION AND WILL

*(Continued from the issue of January 2011)*

ACTIVE surrender is when you associate your will with the Divine Will, reject what is not the Divine, assent to what is the Divine. . . .

(SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 591)

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The absolute surrender must be not only an experience in meditation, but a fact governing all the life, all the thoughts, feelings, actions. Till then the use of one's own will and effort is necessary, but an effort in which also there is the spirit of surrender, calling in the Force to support the will and effort and undisturbed by success or failure. When the Force takes up the sadhana, then indeed effort may cease, but still there will be the necessity of the constant assent of the being and a vigilance so that one may not admit a false Force at any point. (*Ibid.*, pp. 592-93)

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If there is the will to surrender in the central being, then the psychic can come forward.

(SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1100)

\*

There is only one way if you cannot exert your will — it is to call the Force; even the call only with the mind or the mental word is better than being extremely passive and submitted to the attack, — for although it may not succeed instantaneously, the mental call even ends by bringing the Force and opening up the consciousness again. For everything depends upon that. In the externalised consciousness obscurity and suffering can always be there; the more the internalised consciousness reigns, the more these things are pushed back and out, and with the full internalised consciousness they cannot remain — if they come, it is as outside touches unable to lodge themselves in the being. (SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 336)

\*

Yes, it [the Force] is quite concrete. Usually at first it descends of itself from time to time — and also one calls it in face of a difficulty. But eventually it is always there supporting or determining all the action of the being.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 24, p. 1212)

\*

The stream which you feel coming down on the head and pouring into you is indeed a current of the Mother's force; it is so that it is often felt; it flows into the body in currents and works there to liberate and change the consciousness. As the consciousness changes and develops, you will begin yourself to understand the meaning and working of these things. (*Ibid.*, p. 1179)

\*

It is quite true that, left to yourself, you can do nothing; that is why you have to be in contact with the Force which is there to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. The only thing *you* have to do is to allow the force to act and put yourself on its side, . . . (*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 582)

\*

It is good that you felt the peace within and the movement in the heart. That shows the force is working not only from above but inside you, and this promises a farther progress. The full opening will come in time — the important thing is that you are on the right way and advancing more quickly than you realise.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 24, pp. 1178-79)

\*

It is somewhat like that. That is to say, there are always alternations in the intensity of the Force at its work. It comes with great power and effects something that has to be done; then it is either concealed or retires a little or is felt but from behind a screen as you say, while something comes up that has to be prepared for illumination and then it comes in front again and does what has to be done there. But formerly while the support, help, even the deeper consciousness was always there, as you now rightly feel, yet when a veil fell, then it was all forgotten and you felt as if there was nothing but darkness and confusion. This happens to most sadhaks in the earlier stages. It is a great progress, a decisive advance if, at the time the Force is acting behind the screen, you feel that it is there, that the help and support, the more enlightened consciousness is there still. This is the second stage in the sadhana.

There is a third when there is no screen and the Force and all else are always felt whether actively working or pausing during a transition. (*Ibid.*, pp. 1211-12)

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The sadhana is a difficult one and time should not be grudged; it is only in the last stages that a very great and constant rapidity of progress can be confidently expected.

As for Shakti, the descent of Shakti before the vital is pure and surrendered, has its dangers. It is better for him to pray for purification, knowledge, intensity of the heart's aspiration and as much working of the Power as he can bear and assimilate. (*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 627)

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The Power can do everything, change everything and will do that but it can do it perfectly and easily and permanently only when your own will mental, vital and physical has been put on the side of the Truth. (*SABCL*, Vol. 24, pp. 1716-17)

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Our help will be there. It can be effective in spite of your physical mind, but it will be more effective if the steady working will is there as its instrument. There are always two elements in spiritual success — one's own steady will and endeavour and the Power that in one way or another helps and gives the result of the endeavour. (*Ibid.*, p. 1714)

\*

These things cannot be done in that way. For transformation to be genuine, the difficulty has to be rejected by all the parts. The Force can only help or enable them to do it, but it cannot replace this necessary action by a summary process. Your mind and inner being must impart their will to the whole. (*Ibid.*, p. 1717)

\*

There are certain possibilities in the way of the experience. First there is the faith, or sometimes a mental realisation and this of itself is enough to make one open to the Mother's force so that it is always available at need or call. Even if one does not feel the Force coming, yet the results are there and visible. The next is when one feels oneself like an instrument and is aware of the Energy using it. A third is the contact with the Power above and its descent (spontaneous or at call) into the body — this

is the more concrete way of having it, for one physically feels the Force working in one. Finally there is a state of consciousness of close contact with the Mother (inward) which brings a similar result. (*Ibid.*, p. 1204)

\*

. . . it is only either a single-minded faith or a fixed will that can give you the open road to the yoga. It is because your ideas and your will are in a constant state of flux or of oscillation that you do not succeed. Even with a deficient faith, a fixed mind and will can carry one on and bring the experiences by which an uncertain faith is changed into certitude. (*SABCL*, Vol. 23, p. 580)

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. . . Those who go and come, can do so profitably only if or because they have made the decision and keep to it; when they are here, it is for the yoga that they come, when they are elsewhere, the will for the yoga remains with them there. . . . If you fixed your will irrevocably, that would give you a chance — and whether you followed it here or elsewhere would make only a minor difference. (*Ibid.*)

\*

In man the use of consciousness by the mental will is imperfect, because memory is limited. Our action is both dispersed and circumscribed because mentally we live from hour to hour in the current of Time, holding only to that which attracts or seems immediately useful to our egoistic mind. We live in what we are doing, we do not control what has been done, but are rather controlled by our past works which we have forgotten. This is because we dwell in the action and its fruits instead of living in the soul and viewing the stream of action from behind it. The Lord, the true Will, stands back from the actions and therefore is their lord and not bound by them. (*SABCL*, Vol. 12, p. 131)

\*

All energies put into activity — thought, speech, feeling, act — go to constitute Karma. These things help to develop the nature in one direction or another, and the nature and its actions and reactions produce their consequences inward and outward: they also act on others and create movements in the general sum of forces which can return upon oneself sooner or later. Thoughts unexpressed can also go out as forces and produce their effects. It is a mistake to think that a thought or will can have effect only when it is expressed in speech or act: the unspoken thought, the

unexpressed will are also active energies and can produce their own vibrations, effects or reactions. (*SABCL*, Vol. 22, p. 477)

\*

The Indian explanation of fate is Karma. We ourselves are our own fate through our actions, but the fate created by us binds us; for what we have sown, we must reap in this life or another. Still we are creating our fate for the future even while undergoing old fate from the past in the present. That gives a meaning to our will and action and does not, as European critics wrongly believe, constitute a rigid and sterilising fatalism. But again, our will and action can often annul or modify even the past Karma, it is only certain strong effects, called *utkaṭa karma*, that are non-modifiable. Here too the achievement of the spiritual consciousness and life is supposed to annul or give the power to annul Karma. For we enter into union with the Will Divine, cosmic or transcendent, which can annul what it had sanctioned for certain conditions, new-create what it had created, the narrow fixed lines disappear, there is a more plastic freedom and wideness. Neither Karma nor Astrology therefore points to a rigid and for ever immutable fate. (*SABCL*, *Ibid.*, p. 468)

\*

Karma is nothing but the will of the Spirit in action, consequence nothing but the creation of will. What is in the will of being, expresses itself in Karma and consequence. When the will is limited in mind, Karma appears as a bondage and a limitation, consequence as a reaction or an imposition. But when the will of the being is infinite in the Spirit, Karma and consequence become instead the joy of the creative Spirit, the construction of the eternal mechanist, the word and drama of the eternal poet, the harmony of the eternal musician, the play of the eternal child. This lesser, bound, seemingly separate evolution is only a step in the free self-creation of the Spirit from its own illimitable Ananda. That is behind all we are and do; to hide it from mind and bring it slowly forward into the front of existence and action is the present play of Self with Nature. (*SABCL*, Vol. 16, pp. 151-52)

\*

A saying of Napoleon's is pregnant of the true truth of this matter. Questioned why, since he talked continually of fate, he thought it worth while to be always thinking and planning, he answered with just reason, "Because it is still Fate who wills that I should plan." This is the truth. There is a Will or Force in the world that determines the result of my actions as part of the great whole; there is a Will in me that determines, concealed by my thought and personal choice, the part that I shall take in determining

the whole. It is this that my mind seizes on and calls my will. But I and mine are masks. It is All-existence that gives me my reality; it is the All-will and All-knowledge that, while I calculate, works in me for its own incalculable purpose.

(SABCL, *Ibid.*, p. 284)

\*

. . . The will is perfected when it gets away from and behind its impulses and its customary ruts of effectuation and discovers an inner power of the Spirit which is the source of an intuitive and luminous action and an original harmonious creation. The movement of perfection is away from all domination by the lower nature and towards a pure and powerful reflection of the being, power, knowledge and delight of the Spirit and Self in the Buddhi.

The Yoga of self-perfection is to make this double movement as absolute as possible. All immiscence of desire in the Buddhi is an impurity. The intelligence coloured by desire is an impure intelligence and it distorts Truth; the will coloured by desire is an impure will and it puts a stamp of distortion, pain and imperfection upon the soul's activity. All immiscence of the emotions of the soul of desire is an impurity and similarly distorts both the knowledge and the action. All subjection of the Buddhi to the sensations and impulses is an impurity. The thought and will have to stand back detached from desire, troubling emotion, distracting or mastering impulse and to act in their own right until they can discover a greater guide, a Will, Tapas or divine Shakti which will take the place of desire and mental will and impulse, an Ananda or pure delight of the spirit and an illumined spiritual knowledge which will express themselves in the action of that Shakti. This complete detachment, impossible without an entire self-government, equality, calm, *śama*, *samatā*, *śānti*, is the surest step towards the purification of the Buddhi. A calm, equal and detached mind can alone reflect the peace or base the action of the liberated spirit.

(SABCL, Vol. 21, p. 642)

\*

The will to the imperfect separative being, that wrong Tapas which makes the soul in Nature attempt to individualise itself, to individualise its being, consciousness, force of being, delight of existence in a separative sense, to have these things as its own, in its own right and not in the right of God and of the universal oneness, is that which brings about this wrong turn and creates the ego. To turn from this original desire is therefore essential, to get back to the will without desire whose whole enjoyment of being and whole will in being is that of a free universal and unifying Ananda. These two things are one, liberation from the will that is of the nature of desire and liberation from the ego, and the oneness which is brought about by the



happy loss of the will of desire and the ego, is the essence of Mukti.

(SABCL, *Ibid.*, p. 654)

\*

The real difficulty is always in ourselves, not in our surroundings. There are three things necessary in order to make men invincible, Will, Disinterestedness and Faith. We may have a will to emancipate ourselves, but sufficient faith may be lacking. We may have a faith in our ultimate emancipation, but the will to use the necessary means may be wanting. And even if there are will and faith, we may use them with a violent attachment to the fruit of our work or with passions of hatred, blind excitement or hasty forcefulness which may produce evil reactions. For this reason it is necessary, in a work of such magnitude, to have resort to a higher Power than that of mind and body in order to overcome unprecedented obstacles. This is the need of *sādhana*.

God is within us, an Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient Power; we and He are of one nature and, if we get into touch with Him and put ourselves in His hands, He will pour into us His own force and we shall realise that we too have our share of godhead, our portion of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. The path is long, but self-surrender makes it short; the way is difficult, but perfect trust makes it easy.

Will is omnipotent, but it must be divine will, selfless, tranquil, at ease about results. "If you had faith even as a grain of mustard-seed," said Jesus, "you would say to this mountain, Come, and it would come to you." What was meant by the word Faith, was really Will accompanied with perfect *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* does not reason, it knows; for it commands sight and sees what God wills, and it knows that what is God's will, must happen. *Śraddhā*, not blind but using sight spiritual, can become omniscient.

Will is also omnipresent. It can throw itself into all with whom it comes into contact and give them temporarily or permanently a portion of its power, its thought, its enthusiasms. The thought of a solitary man can become, by exercise of selfless and undoubting will, the thought of a nation. The will of a single hero can breathe courage into the hearts of a million cowards.

This is the Sadhana that we have to accomplish. This is the condition of our emancipation. We have been using an imperfect will with imperfect faith and imperfect disinterestedness. Yet the task we have before us is not less difficult than to move a mountain.

The force that can do it, exists. But it is hidden in a secret chamber within us and of that chamber God holds the key. Let us find Him and claim it.

(SABCL, Vol. 17, pp. 178-79)

(To be continued)

(Compiled by Gautam Malakar)

## THE LUMINOUS PAST

*[Pramila Devi was born in Chittagong in what is now Bangladesh. She came to the Ashram in 1941.]*

*She worked in the Laundry and the Bakery until 1962 when she was asked by the Mother to look after one of the hostels for the students, the 'Jhunjhun Home'.*

*She also taught French in the School for a number of years. She passed away in 1995.]*

LIFE in the early years of the Ashram was very beautiful. In trying to pen a few stories from those years I have had to go into my memory and pull out some images which as a symbol of the Mother's grace have remained bright even today in my heart. Quite naturally, what I am about to write will neither follow a chronological sequence nor a table of contents according to subject matter. I will pray for the Mother's blessings and write the words as they come to me.

\*

When I think of the past the first thing that comes to mind is the activity of the morning. "To behold that face upon waking up — everything will go well today." We lived our days so happily, because as soon as we woke up in the morning we got to see the Mother's beloved face. Getting out of bed, with the water-jar in our hands,<sup>1</sup> we ran to the balcony road to get a *darshan* of the Mother. When we saw Nolini-da stepping off the pavement and coming on to the road, we understood that the Mother was about to appear. We stood with palms joined in prayer, awaiting the Mother. The Mother would come, then placing both her hands on the railing of the balcony, she would smile sweetly and look at everybody. After that she would turn her eyes to the blue sky. While she looked at the play of clouds we gazed at her beautiful and soft fingers which were like the buds of the golden *champa* flowers, and as we rested our eyes on them, a sense of the sacred filled our hearts. After that the Mother's gaze again fell on us, we who were contemplating her, and she smiled at us, radiant as the sun, her eyes full of compassion. There was no end to our good fortune, it was limitless. Having filled our lives with the shower of her soothing smile which seemed to have no end, the Mother would then gently step back and withdraw.

\*

1. It was the usual practice in those days for the Ashramites to go and fetch filtered water for themselves in an earthen jar from the filter which is behind the Children's Dispensary.

We would quickly finish our chores in the house and would rush to the Dining Room for breakfast. There we would hear everyday a French sentence being exchanged: “*Victoire à la Douce Mère*”, meaning “Victory to Sweet Mother”. Of course, in those days I could not understand the meaning of this sentence. I would quietly finish my breakfast as soon as I could and come away. One day something very funny happened. An old *sadhak*, who was short and sported long hair and a long beard, stopped me on my way and commanded, “Repeat after me: ‘*Victoire à la Douce Mère*.’” Thinking that my pronunciation would not be quite right I bent my head and remained silent. Mixing Hindi and Bengali together he requested me again and again to repeat that sentence. I continued to remain silent while others explained to him that I had newly come to the Ashram and that saying such a sentence would be difficult for me. But he was adamant. Under the pouring rain, umbrella in hand, he accompanied me up to the bakery. There, on seeing my elder cousin (Jatin-da), which brought great joy to both of them, they cried out in chorus: “*Victoire à la Douce Mère*.” My cousin explained to me who he was and asked me to do a *pranam* to him. I did as I was told. But the man continued to tell me in a tone of authority, “You have to say this *mantra* of victory.” After some encouragement I finally managed to repeat the words. Then he laughed and said that I deserved ten out of ten for this. He asked my cousin to teach me French. After that he turned around and said, “Little sister, don’t think that I was being authoritarian, actually this is an expression of my affection.” He was Vasudha’s elder brother, the engineer Chandulal.

\*

However I did not have the good fortune of enjoying the love of this affectionate *sadhak* for long. Before I could know him well he breathed his last at the general hospital after an operation on his abdomen. After the operation he was intensely thirsty and became very restless. The doctor reported the matter of his restlessness to the Mother to which the Mother replied that she herself would be the first to give water to Chandulal. On hearing this Chandulal became calm. One word from the Mother and his thirst had been quenched. It was as if his chest was going to burst and his throat was dry as a piece of wood, but Chandulal had no complaints. He was deep in meditation. Sweet Mother, at the appropriate moment, sent some cold water through Vasudha. Glowing with happiness, Chandulal opened parched lips, and drank that blessed water. With a bright smile on his face, filled with the shower of the Mother’s love and his body glowing with a great peace he closed his eyes never to open them again. I heard later that the Mother had said to someone that he was reborn and returned to the Ashram within a short time.

\*

Throughout the day and until the evening the Mother used to give several *darshans* other than the balcony *darshan*. At 8 o'clock in the morning, through the window, we could see two blue eyes and fingers like the buds of the Champa flower. We could see her taking a walk on the terrace holding Chinmayi's hand. In this manner we saw many facets of her greatness. There was a crow. His name was Blacky. The Mother was very fond of him. First she would go near him and taking a piece of bread from Chinmayi's hand she would feed him. After all, she was also this crow's mother. One day, for some reason, she did not bring any bread. Blacky was impatient and started walking in front of the Mother. Chinmayi ran and got a piece of bread and jokingly told the Mother, "Mother, today I will feed him." The Mother happily gestured to her to give it to him. But the crow turned his face away. He would not eat from Chinmayi's hand. He moved away a little and kept looking at the Mother with tear-filled eyes. Chinmayi was forced to hand the piece of bread to the Mother. As soon as the piece of bread was in the Mother's hand he took it immediately. After that with great joy he went and sat on a branch and started eating.

*(To be continued)*

PRAMILA DEVI

*(Translated by Sunayana Panda from the original Bengali "Ujwal Ateet".)*

*All these difficulties should be faced in a more quiet and less egoistic spirit.*

*This yoga is a spiritual battle; its very attempt raises all sorts of adverse forces and one must be ready to face difficulties, sufferings, reverses of all sorts in a calm unflinching spirit.*

*The difficulties that come are ordeals and tests and if one meets them in the right spirit, one comes out stronger and spiritually purer and greater.*

*No misfortune can come, the adverse forces cannot touch or be victorious unless there is some defect in oneself, some impurity, weakness or, at the very least, ignorance. One should then seek out this weakness in oneself and correct it.*

*When there is an attack from the human instruments of adverse forces, one should try to overcome it not in a spirit of personal hatred or anger or wounded egoism, but with a calm spirit of strength and equanimity and a call to the Divine Force to act. Success or failure lies with the Divine.*

*In dealing with others there is a way of speaking and doing which gives most offence and opens one most to misunderstanding and there is also a way which is quiet and firm but conciliatory to those who can be conciliated — all who are not absolutely of bad will. It is better to use the latter than the former. No weakness, no arrogance or violence, this should be the spirit.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, pp. 1639-40)*

## LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

(Continued from the issue of January 2011)

### 12. Delight of Existence

FROM childhood onwards one is engaged in marking something out as a favourite. The fond father asks the prattler on his lap: “Whom do you love more, me or amma?” A one year-old is generally astute. It hugs the father, saying, “You!” but its eyes, sparkling and smiling, are turned towards the mother. I have often imagined this situation whenever worshipping the Somaskanda image in temples dedicated to Shiva. Beginning with the Pallavas (7<sup>th</sup> century) we have had these images where Shiva and Parvati are seated with the child Skanda (Subrahmanya) between them. Who is Skanda’s favourite?

Then one grows up. There are favourite friends, favourite colours, favourite flowers, favourite food items, favourite songs. So can I think of my favourite cocoon in *The Life Divine*? No hesitation for me! Book One, Chapters XI and XII. The reason is not far to seek. The title for both is Delight of Existence! When engaged in Sri Aurobindo’s writings, the phrase places us speedily into *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

Therefore when the heart and life turn towards the Highest and the Infinite, they arrive not at an abstract existence or non-existence, a Sat or else a Nirvana, but at an existent, a Sat Purusha, not merely at a consciousness, but at a conscious Being, a Chaitanya Purusha, not merely at a purely impersonal delight of the Is, but at an infinite I Am of bliss, an Anandamaya Purusha; nor can they immerse and lose his consciousness and bliss in featureless existence, but must insist on all three in one, for delight of existence is their highest power and without consciousness delight cannot be possessed. That is the sense of the supreme figure of the intensest Indian religion of love, Sri Krishna, the All-blissful and All-beautiful.<sup>1</sup>

That is the secret. The title is a charmed magic casement that opens on the waves of ecstatic bliss, in the faery lands of Brindavan. What is this Delight, this Bliss, this Ananda of sheer existence? The first of the two chapters that states the problem opens with a Taittiriya Upanishad quote that repeats the magic term, *Ananda, anandam brahmeti vyajānāt!*

1. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 579-80.

From Delight all these beings are born, by Delight they exist and grow, to Delight they return.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo goes straight to the ‘problem’. Why did the Brahman engage itself in this complicated process of creation? What we have is, of course, “a conscious existence the very term of whose being, the very term of whose consciousness is bliss”. It is Ananda that goes out and creates.

In everything that is, dwells the conscious force and it exists and is what it is by virtue of that conscious force; so also in everything that is there is the delight of existence and it exists and is what it is by virtue of that delight.<sup>3</sup>

Such is our narrow mentality, that we are not going to give a silent assent to this statement. Ananda? Delight? With all this sorrow around? With so much pain, physical and mental? Who will accept Existence as an Ananda-proposition when listening to our petty politicians who lecture to us as if they were a tribe of sea-green, incorruptible devas? But our Master knows his readers very well. We are at the mental level. Our questions are understandable and he says immediately:

This ancient Vedantic theory of cosmic origin is immediately confronted in the human mind by two powerful contradictions, the emotional and sensational consciousness of pain and the ethical problem of evil.<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo then proceeds to explain that Ananda being our normal state, “we do not treasure it”. This seems true enough. How much do we take for granted all that is good in our existence! Eyes to see, ears to hear, hands to paint and legs to walk! But the moment there is a loss of vision, we turn to the Creator: “O Lord! Don’t *you* have eyes to see my plight?” Reading Sri Aurobindo in this chapter has at least had one sobering influence upon me. To value what I have, not to wail over what I have not. Physical losses, personal failures . . . one gets to have a huge volume of recordings when entering the fourth quarter of one’s century. No, there is no time to moan about what I have not had in life, what I have failed to achieve.

However, pain is a fact of existence. As Shelley gave voice to a universal keening:

2. Taittiriya Upanishad II. 7; III. 6 in *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 98.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

We look before and after,  
 And pine for what is not:  
 Our sincerest laughter  
 With some pain is fraught;  
 Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Granted that this is the universal experience, why does pain have a place in the Designer's Chart? If God is a conscious Being who has authored this existence, how come "He inflicts suffering on His creatures, sanctions pain, permits evil"? Is he no more than a "cunning psychologist"? All this will come through in the mantric poetry of *Savitri* at a later date when Aswapati's queen would question Rishi Narad:

O seer, in the earth's strange twi-natured life  
 By what pitiless adverse Necessity  
 Or what cold freak of a Creator's will,  
 By what random accident or governed Chance  
 That shaped a rule out of fortuitous steps,  
 Made destiny from an hour's emotion, came  
 Into the unreadable mystery of Time  
 The direr mystery of grief and pain?  
 Is it thy God who made this cruel law?  
 Or some disastrous Power has marred his work  
 And he stands helpless to defend or save?<sup>5</sup>

Sri Aurobindo points out that this problem arises only when we think of a God beyond this creation. The Vedantin has had it right, *Ekam advitīyam*: "all that is, is He." So the creator himself experiences the Ananda as well as the pain.

But why should there be pain whether for me or for the creator in me? This necessarily makes us look beyond the ethical problem of pain and evil that affects Existence. What is pain? What is evil? Sri Aurobindo turns our faces gently towards the evolutionary endeavour that is going on all the time:

Man desires self-expression, self-development, in other words, the progressing play in himself of the conscious-force of existence; that is his fundamental delight. Whatever hurts that self-expression, self-development, satisfaction of his progressing self, is for him evil; whatever helps, confirms, raises, aggrandises, ennobles it is his good. Only, his conception of the self-development changes, becomes higher and wider, begins to exceed his limited personality, to embrace others, to embrace all in its scope.<sup>6</sup>

5. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 437-38.

6. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 104.



So these ethical ideals of moral evil and of good are but stages in evolution. Does the tiger think it is a sin to eat the deer? But we have attained the mental plane and reached a stage of considering things as evil and as good. If so, the next plane in evolutionary progress could be supra-ethical, rather there would be no need for such ethical categorisation. However, we are not to escape the problem with such ease. Sri Aurobindo invites us to find what is common to all these states of infra-ethical, ethical and supra-ethical planes of existence. Delight is the common category, not in the sense we use it with our partially-open minds but that which is “universal, illimitable and self-existent, not dependent on particular causes, the background of all backgrounds, from which pleasure, pain and other more neutral experiences emerge.” Sri Aurobindo’s words are on the wing as he brings the chapter to an end with the statement that with the descent of the divine consciousness-force the problem will be resolved.

In connection with a lecture on this chapter, Purani-ji was asked a question by one of the listeners whether “the evolution of the trees and everything etc., go beyond what they are, then?” We would do well to remember Purani-ji’s answer:

Yes, it might go. It can, one day, and even now when the consciousness rises to the supra-conscious; then trees will cease to be what they are now. They will become very conscious expressions of some universal truth of being, consciousness and delight. Not only that, but you can also have a communication with them — then you know what they mean. One of the Mother’s prayers is very fine, in which she says that when she was in Japan, she saw that the trees were rising up because they wanted to open themselves to the higher Light. They were trying to aspire to the Light, and it was the expression of their aspiration that this upward movement signified in the vegetable world.<sup>7</sup>

Taking up the thread in the following chapter, Sri Aurobindo says that the underlying delight of existence remains while others change and pass. This remains “hidden, profound, subconscious”. Here we have the solution to the problem of pain and evil. How can there be a creation without the impulsion of Delight?

Delight is existence, Delight is the secret of creation, Delight is the root of birth, Delight is the cause of remaining in existence, Delight is the end of birth and that into which creation ceases.<sup>8</sup>

This world-movement itself can then be taken as a divine play, a Lila caused by Ananda. The movement has continued because Ananda is its basis and not pain.

7. A. B. Purani, *Sri Aurobindo’s Life Divine* (1966), p. 99.

8. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 109.



Else it would have stopped evolving. While such is the Delight of Existence, Maya delimits a part of it but is no illusion. It is very much the Infinite Reality, a divine play of Delight, Prakriti or Nature as we know her. Whatever may be the action of this Lila, it gets its support from the basic Delight of Existence. If this basis were not there, man would not go through pain at all nor give a firm fight to Evil.

Behind there must be something in us, — much vaster, profounder, truer than the superficial consciousness, — which takes delight impartially in all experiences; it is that delight which secretly supports the superficial mental being and enables it to persevere through all labours, sufferings and ordeals in the agitated movement of the Becoming. That which we call ourselves is only a trembling ray on the surface; behind is all the vast subconscious, the vast superconscious . . .<sup>9</sup>

I like the statement, “That which we call ourselves is only a trembling ray on the surface”. I feel it puts me in my proper place. Trembling ray indeed! All the while trembling whether I have said the right thing or done the right act or written the right word . . . Certainly Sri Aurobindo does not distance us from himself or the *The Life Divine*. And the assurance! “The truth of ourselves lies within and not on the surface.” The Anandamaya is within us; it is the Manomaya personality which laughs, weeps, rages, terrorises, worries . . .

The same rule applies to physical pain. “Pain of mind and body is a device of Nature” to help the upward evolution and even now one can try to overcome it by withdrawing thoughts of ‘I-ness’ from oneself. This happens all the time in our own experience. We have been told how Ramana Maharishi was indifferent to the terrible pain of cancer because he had ceased to think of himself as the “I”. He said that pain was but a state of mind. Even when suffering intense pain, if some dear one comes into the room, pain is forgotten for the nonce. If this is possible, cannot pain be rejected *in toto* by the infusion of the Delight of Existence?

But the term ‘why’ continues. Sri Aurobindo says that “infinite delight loses itself in the appearance of non-being and emerges in the appearance of a finite Soul”, and thus begins the upward journey. Is this “trembling ray” capable of this journey? The question is redundant. Man has to do it or perish. If he wants to succeed and gain the Next Future then he must act. Sri Aurobindo’s words come as a tablet of commandments:

Man, the individual, has to become and to live as a universal being; his limited mental consciousness has to widen to the superconscious unity in which each embraces all; his narrow heart has to learn the infinite embrace and replace its lusts and discords by universal love and his restricted vital being to become

9. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

equal to the whole shock of the universe upon it and capable of universal delight; his very physical being has to know itself as no separate entity but as one with and sustaining in itself the whole flow of the indivisible Force that is all things; his whole nature has to reproduce in the individual the unity, the harmony, the oneness-in-all of the supreme Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.<sup>10</sup>

This has to be done by the human race, says Sri Aurobindo, assuming a tone of warning in a later chapter:

Unless therefore the race is to fall by the wayside and leave the victory to other and new creations of the eager travelling Mother, it must aspire to this ascent, conducted indeed through love . . .<sup>11</sup>

We are no strangers to the call. Lest we fail to understand this new life, we have a remarkable portrayal of such a society in *Savitri*. The adventures of Aswapati as the traveller of the world are actually visuals of the universal being emerging out of man, described in the passage quoted above. No more the divorce between the Delight of Existence within and the partial delight of human life! We watch the universal man in Aswapati in 'The House of the Spirit and the New Creation'

His nature grew a movement of the All,  
Exploring itself to find that all was He,  
His soul was a delegation of the All  
That turned from itself to join the one Supreme.  
Transcended was the human formula;  
Man's heart that had obscured the Inviolable  
Assumed the mighty beating of a god's;  
His seeking mind ceased in the Truth that knows;  
His life was a flow of the universal life.  
He stood fulfilled on the world's highest line  
Awaiting the ascent beyond the world,  
Awaiting the descent the world to save.<sup>12</sup>

When Sri Aurobindo commands, we are ready to act. Our desire to gain this new consciousness grows fast when we see the achiever in the house of the spirit, the New Creation we are dreaming about. But how to do it?

10. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

12. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 319.

The title of the two chapters shows us the way. Delight of Existence! And who is the Master of this Delight? The Anandamaya Purusha, “the supreme figure of the intensest Indian religion of love, Sri Krishna, the All-blissful and All-beautiful.”<sup>13</sup> Surrendering to Him, one can reach out through Him to the whole existence.

As I begin to conclude this year-long meditation on living with *The Life Divine*, I have often wondered at the fascination the book has exercised upon me since childhood. How so? The answer crystallised on its own when I was engaged in writing these essays. My Vaishnava upbringing has helped me feel in tune with Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy. Ramanuja also says that the creation is Brahman’s Play: *lokavat lilakaivalyam*. Sheer, exuberant Ananda creating this universe. Again this importance given by Sri Aurobindo to love, bhakti as we seek to ascend the evolutionary spiral: “. . . it must aspire to this ascent, conducted indeed through love . . .”

The two terms, Ananda and Bhakti are very important for the Ramanuja Darsana. For Sri Ramanuja, Brahman is no attributeless, unknowable entity. It is actually an image of all auspicious qualities, a *divya mangala vighraha*. This has had a silent effect upon me in feeling at home with *The Life Divine*. Sri Ramanuja in his philosophical works has much to say about the qualities of Brahman and the way to gain Brahman-knowledge. Ananda and bhakti are the key components in the description and the process of attainment where the Way is also the Goal.

Strengthened by Sri Aurobindo’s words that the Anandamaya Purusha is best found in “the supreme figure of the intensest Indian religion of love, Sri Krishna, the All-blissful and All-beautiful” I have received constantly reassurances from his writings and from elsewhere that surrendering to this image is the easiest and best way to make one’s passageway through life beautiful and draw closer to the Life Divine. In *Savitri* Krishna had guarded Satyavan just as He had covered Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore jail.

An early child-god took my hand that held,  
Moved, guided by the seeking of his touch,  
Bright forms and hues which fled across his sight;  
Limned upon page and stone they spoke to men.<sup>14</sup>

It is not mere book reading either or listening to others. I had had the precious privilege of watching my father remain absorbed for hours in Sri Aurobindo’s works and in Krishna literature. It is significant that his last work was *Krishna-Geetam* (1994). Some of the darkest moments of his life were upon him when he was writing the poem, but faith and hope nurtured his thoughts, as always:

13. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 580.

14. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 404.

Watch a small child at play, seemingly so  
self-absorbed, and wholly pleased  
with herself, and the environing world:  
that's Delight of Existence.

The gifted hero-archer Arjuna,  
and Yogeshwara Krishna:  
aren't they the two-in-one Power and Grace  
of our Ananda Yoga?

Arjuna surrendering (*sishyasteham*) and Krishna freeing him from sorrow (*mā śuca*). For those who have recognised the significance of this image, life on earth does become the life divine.

*Namo Divya Jivana granthāya!*  
*Tvameva pratyaksham Brahmāsi!*

(Concluded)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

*The historicity of Krishna is of less spiritual importance and is not essential, but it has still a considerable value. It does not seem to me that there can be any reasonable doubt that Krishna the man was not a legend or a poetic invention but actually existed upon earth and played a part in the Indian past. Two facts emerge clearly, that he was regarded as an important spiritual figure, one whose spiritual illumination was recorded in one of the Upanishads, and that he was traditionally regarded as a divine man, one worshipped after his death as a deity; this is apart from the story in the Mahabharata and the Puranas. There is no reason to suppose that the connection of his name with the development of the Bhagavata religion, an important current in the stream of Indian spirituality, was founded on a mere legend or poetic invention. The Mahabharata is a poem and not history, but it is clearly a poem founded on a great historical event, traditionally preserved in memory; some of the figures connected with it, Dhritarashtra, Parikshit, for instance, certainly existed and the story of the part played by Krishna as leader, warrior and statesman can be accepted as probable in itself and to all appearance founded on a tradition which can be given a historical value and has not the air of a myth or a sheer poetical invention.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 425-26)