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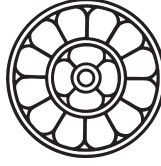
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in

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Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

Editors: RAVI, HEMANT KAPOOR, RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXX

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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SUDDENLY OUT FROM THE WONDERFUL EAST

Suddenly out from the wonderful East like a woman exulting
Dawn stepped forth with a smile on her lips, and the glory of morning
Hovered over the hills; then sweet grew air with the breezes,
Sweet and keen as a wild swift virgin; the wind walked blithely,
Low was the voice of the leaves as they rustled and talked with the river,
Ganges, the sacred river. Down from the northlands crowding,
Touching the steps of the ghauts with the silver tips of their fingers
Lightly the waters ran and talked to each other of sunshine,
Lightly they laughed. But high on his stake impaled by the roadway
Hung Mandavya the mighty in marble deep meditation,
Sepulchred, dumb; on his either side were the thieves, immobile.
They were dead, made free from cruelty, ceasing from anguish,
And forgetting the thirst. But past them Ganges the mighty,
First of the streams of the earth, our Mother, remembering the ages,
Poured to the sea.

Early at dawn by her ghauts the women of Mithila gathered.
There they filled their gurgling jars, or gilding the Ganges
Bathed in her waters and laughed as they bathed there clamouring, dashing
Dew of her coolness in eyes of each other: the banks called sweetly
Mad with the musical laughter of girls and joy of their crying,
Low melodious cries. As when in a wood on the hillsides
Thousands of bulbuls flitting and calling, eating the wild plums,
Filling the ear with sweetness carry from treetop to treetop
Vermeil of crest and scarlet of tail and small brown bodies
Flitting and calling, calling and flitting, full of sweet clamour,
Full of the wine of life, even such was the sweetness and clamour,
Women bathing close by the ghauts of the radiant Ganges,
Golden-limbed or white or darker than olives when ripest,
Lovely of face or of mood, but all sweethearted and happy
Aryan women. One there seemed of another moulding
Who was aloof from the crowd and the chaos of cheerful faces.
She at one side of the stairway slowly like one half-musing
Bathed there, hiding her face in the deep cool bosom of waters,
Losing herself in Ganges, or let its pearl drops dribble
Quietly down through the mystical night of her tresses on gleaming
Shoulders, betwixt her great breasts noble as hills at noontide
Back to their hurrying home: nor heeded the laughter near her.

Only at times when the clamour grew high, she would look up smiling
 Such a slow sweet serious smile as a tender mother
 Watching her children at play might smile forgetting the sorrow
 Down in her own still patient heart where the deep tears gathered
 Swell unwept, till they turn to a sea of sorrowful pity.

SRI AUROBINDO

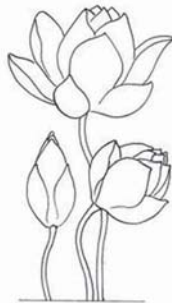
(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 260-61)

Suddenly out from the wonderful East.

No title in the manuscript. Circa 1900-1902. This poem is Sri Aurobindo's earliest surviving attempt to write a poem in dactylic hexameters. A fair copy is found on the same sheet as a fair copy of "To the Boers", which was written around 1900-1902. This and another draft of the poem were seized by the British police when Sri Aurobindo was arrested in 1908. Several years later, in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo began what appears to be a new or revised version of this poem, but wrote only three lines:

Where in a lapse of the hills leaps lightly down with laughter
 White with her rustle of raiment upon the spray strewn boulders,
 Cold in her virgin childhood the river resonant Ganges.

(*From the editorial 'Note on the Texts'*; CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 701)



EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

(Continued from the issue of April 2017)

PART FOUR THE FUNDAMENTAL REALISATIONS OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA

SECTION FOUR THE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Chapter Two Ascent to the Higher Planes

Contact with the Above

These are the ordinary normal experiences of the sadhana when there is an opening from above — the contact with the peace of the Brahman, Self or Divine and the contact with the higher Power, the Power of the Mother. He does not know what they are, quite naturally, but feels very correctly and his description is quite accurate. “How beautiful, calm and still all seems — as if in water there were not even a wave. But it is not Nothingness. I feel a Presence steeped in life but absolutely silent and quiet in meditation”, — there could hardly be a better description of this experience, — the experience of the peace and silence of the Divine or of the Divine itself in its own essential peace and silence. Also what he feels about the Force is quite correct, “something from above the manifested creation (mind-matter), a Force behind that is distinct from that which gives rise to emotions, anger, lust which are all purified and transformed gradually”, in other words, the Divine or Spiritual Force, other than the cosmic vital which supports the ordinary embodied consciousness; that is also very clear. I suppose it is only a contact yet, but a very true and vivid contact if it gives rise to so vivid and true a feeling. It looks as if he were going to make a very good beginning.

*

One may get influences from above, but so long as the mind is not full of the higher calm, peace, silence, one cannot be in direct contact. These influences get diminished, mentalised, vitalised and are not the powers of the higher planes in their native

character. Nor is this sufficient to get control of the hidden forces of all the planes of consciousness, which is perhaps what he means by occultism.

*

Indirect connection [*with the Divine*] is when one lives in the ordinary consciousness without being able to go up above it and receives influences from above without knowing where they come from or feeling their source.

*

Sometimes one feels an ascension above the head. I think he has had that, but that is the mind going up (when it is not simply a going out of the body) into the higher mental planes. To be above the mind one must first realise the self above the mind and live there.

*

Do you realise it [*the higher being*] as wide and infinite? When you are there do you feel it spread through infinity? Do you feel all the universe within you, yourself one with the self of all beings? Do you feel the one cosmic Force acting everywhere? Do you feel your mind one with the cosmic mind? your life one with the cosmic life? your matter one with the cosmic Matter? separative ego unreal? the body no longer a limitation? What is the use of merely saying that the higher being is wide and infinite? Do these realisations come when you are in the higher being and if not, why not? The inner being easily opens to all these realisations, the outer does not. So unless your inner being becomes conscious of itself, the mere ascent gives only height or some vague sense of other planes, not these concrete realisations.

Ascension or Rising above the Head

This is a fundamental experience of the Yoga. It is the free ascent of the consciousness to join the Divine. When, liberated from its ordinary identification with the body, it rises upward to have experiences of the higher planes, to link itself with the psychic or the true being or to join the Divine Consciousness, then there is this experience of ascension and of speeding or expanding through space. The joy you feel is a sign of this last movement, — rising to join the Divine; the passivity and expectancy of a descent are signs of the openness to the Divine that is its result; there is also the sense of this openness, an emptiness of the ordinary contents of the consciousness, a wideness not limited by the narrow prison of the physical personality. There is

too, usually or very often, a massive immobility of the body which corresponds to the silence that comes on the mind when it is released from itself — the Silence that is the foundation of spiritual experience. What you have felt (the former experiences were probably preparatory touches) is indeed the beginning of this foundation — a consciousness free, wide, empty at will, able to rise into the supraphysical planes, open to the descent of whatever the Mother will pour into it.

*

Nothing needs to be done to bring the ascension — aspiration is sufficient. The object of the ascension is for the lower nature to join the higher consciousness so that (1) the limit or lid between the higher and the lower may be broken and disappear, (2) the consciousness may have free access to higher and higher planes, (3) a free way may be made for the descent of the higher Consciousness into the lower planes.

*

The lower consciousness rises to meet the higher consciousness — when it joins there is the sense of unity and the feeling of the one cosmic Self with Ananda and Peace or both as the result. This is called the ascent of the lower consciousness — it cannot remain all the time but it can become more and more frequent until the descent of the higher consciousness is ready.

*

That [*rising above the head*] is very good. Such risings help to break down the lid between the higher and lower planes in the consciousness and prepare the consciousness.

*

The rising of the energies of the consciousness to the crown of the head and beyond is a recognised movement of the sadhana. It is the forces of the lower Prakriti rising to connect themselves with the higher spiritual consciousness above. The hearing of bells is usually a sign of an opening of the consciousness; it is mentioned in the Upanishads as one of such significant sounds and is well known to Yogis.

*

(1) Freedom from cares, lightness of mind and body are very good results. They do not usually become permanent at once — it is sufficient if they are frequently or ordinarily there.

(2) Chest and head rising higher are sensations of the subtle body — it means that the mind and heart consciousness (thinking mental and emotional) are rising to meet the spiritual consciousness plane above the head.

(3) The sound is a sign of the opening of the consciousness and of the working of the inner Force. Such subtle sounds are very frequently heard by those who practise Yoga.

*

Everything in the adhar in the sadhana has at one time the tendency to rise and join its source above.

*

The upward movement and the silence are indispensable for the Truth to manifest.

Ascent and Return to the Ordinary Consciousness

I may say that the opening upwards, the ascent into the Light and the subsequent descent into the ordinary consciousness and normal human life is very common as the first decisive experience in the practice of Yoga and may very well happen even without the practice of Yoga in those who are destined for the spiritual change, especially if there is a dissatisfaction somewhere with the ordinary life and a seeking for something more, greater or better. It comes often exactly in the way that she describes and the cessation of the experience and the descent also come in the same way. This first experience may be followed by a very long time during which there is no repetition of it or any subsequent experience. If there is a constant practice of Yoga, the interval need not be so long; but even so it is often long enough. The descent is inevitable because it is not the whole being that has risen up but only something within and all the rest of the nature is unprepared, absorbed in or attached to ordinary life and governed by movements that are not in consonance with the Light. Still the something within is something central in the being and therefore the experience is in a way definitive and decisive. For it comes as a decisive intimation of the spiritual destiny and an indication of what must be reached some time in the life. Once it has been there, something is bound to happen which will open the way, determine the right knowledge and the right attitude enabling one to proceed on the way and bring a helping influence. After that the work of clearing away the obstacles

that prevent the return to the Light and the ascension of the whole being and, what is equally important, the descent of the Light into the whole being can be begun and progress towards completion. It may take long or be rapid, that depends on the inner push and also on outer circumstances but the inner aspiration and endeavour count more than the circumstances which can accommodate themselves to the inner need if that is very strong. The moment has come for her and the necessary aspiration and knowledge and the influence that can help her.

Ascent and Dissolution

Once the being or its different parts begin to ascend to the planes above, any part of the being may do it, frontal or other. The *sanskara* that one cannot come back must be got rid of. One can have the experience of Nirvana at the summit of the mind or anywhere in those planes that are now superconscient to the mind; the mind spiritualised by the ascent into Self has the sense of *laya*, dissolution of itself, its thoughts, movements, *sanskaras* into a superconscient Silence and Infinity which it is unable to grasp, — the Unknowable. But this would bring or lead to some form of Nirvana only if one makes Nirvana the goal, if one is tied to the mind and accepts its dissolution into the Infinite as one's own dissolution or if one has not the capacity to reorganise experience on a higher than the mental plane. But otherwise what was superconscient becomes conscient, one begins to possess or else be the instrument of the dynamis of the higher planes and there is a movement, not of liberation into Nirvana, but of liberation + transformation. However high one goes, one can always return, unless one has the will not to do so.

Ascent and the Psychic Being

Any part of the being can go upward and meet its source there. The central being is always above; the psychic is its counterpart below. If the psychic goes up it may be also to join its source in the central being.

*

The psychic being and other parts can go up to join the higher consciousness there. It is part of the movement of ascent. Naturally the psychic wants a deeper union than can be had so long as it is veiled by the old ignorant nature; it wants the higher consciousness to come down and occupy and transform it so that complete union may be possible.

The Shakti going up from the Muladhara must be the Shakti of the physical

nature. It wants transformation also, I suppose, but it has not the quiet and luminous but ardent aspiration of the psychic being — its aspiration is more troubled and tinged with unease.

*

In your experience the ascent was into the regions of the calm and silent Self above; when you came down you went into the depths of the psychic being and found there the same calm and wideness. This experience is of great importance for it means that the way to both these is now open to you — and these two are the fundamental experiences of our Yoga — the unveiling of the psychic and the self-realisation. Pursue your meditations in the same poise.

Ascent and the Body

The ordinary movement of sadhana is that of the inner being (mind, psychic, higher vital) rising towards the Divine Consciousness, — leaving the external being behind — but for this Yoga that is not enough, the physical and external being must also be able to rise into the Divine Consciousness.

*

What you have written is quite correct. The body is not connected ordinarily with the higher consciousness, it only receives what it can from the mind. It is being prepared for the direct connection by the ascent of the inner or subtle body into that plane and the descent from it of the higher Light.

*

No, the body itself cannot go up — how could it? The body is meant for keeping the consciousness linked to the physical world.

*

If all went up, there would be no more existence in the body. There is always some consciousness and therefore some self supporting the body.

*

When the consciousness is centred above, it can be said to be located above. That does not mean that there is no consciousness left in the lower parts.

Ascent and Going out of the Body

There are two different things. One is the consciousness actually going out of the body — but that brings a deep sleep or trance. The other is the consciousness lifting itself out of the body and taking its stand outside it — above and spread round in wideness. That can be a condition of the Yogin in the waking state — he does not feel himself to be in the body but he feels the body to be in his wide free self, he is delivered from limitation in the body consciousness.

*

There are two different experiences which from your account would seem to have happened together.

(1) An exteriorisation of the consciousness out of the body. Part of the consciousness, mental, vital or subtle physical or all together rises out of the body, leaving it in a strongly internalised condition, sleep or trance and can move about above on other planes or in the room and outside on the earth plane. In such cases the body can be seen as lying below or in the room, seen clearly as one sees a separate object with the physical eyes. A fear such as you had can come in these exteriorisations and bring the consciousness back with a rush to the body.

(2) An ascension of the consciousness to a position which is no longer in the body but above it. The consciousness can thus ascend and rise higher and higher with the awareness of entering regions above the ordinary mind; usually it does not go very far at first but acquires the capacity to go always higher in repetitions of this experience. At the close of the experience it returns to the body. But also there comes a definitive rise by which the consciousness permanently takes its station above. It is no longer in the body or limited by it; it feels itself not only above it but extended in space; the body is below its high station and enveloped in its extended consciousness. Sometimes indeed the extension is felt only above on the higher level and the enveloping extension below comes only afterwards as a later experience. But the nature of it is to be definitive, it is not merely an experience but a realisation, a permanent change. This brings a liberation from identification with the body which becomes only a circumstance in the largeness of the being, an instrumental part of it; or it is felt as something very small or even non-existent, nothing seems to be left but a wide practically infinite consciousness which is oneself — or, if not at once infinite, yet what is now called a boundless finite.

This new consciousness is open to all knowledge from above, but it does not think with the brain as does the ordinary mind — it has other and larger means of awareness than thought. No methodical opening of the centres is necessary — the centres are in fact open, otherwise there could not be this ascent. In this Yoga their opening comes automatically — what we call opening is not that, but an ability of

the consciousness itself on the various levels to receive the descent of the Higher Consciousness above. By the ascent one can indeed bring down knowledge from above. But the larger movement is to receive it from above and let it flow through into the lower mental and other levels. I may add that on all these levels, in mind, heart and below there comes a liberation from the physical limitation, a wideness which no longer allows an identification with the body.

In this experience there is not usually the fear you had, unless it is in the body consciousness, as it were, which is alarmed by the unfamiliarity of the movement and fears to be abandoned or cast off. But this occurs rarely and does not usually repeat itself. It is therefore likely that there was an exteriorisation at the same time. You speak of being able to leave and enter the body at will; but this capacity is needed only for the phenomenon of exteriorisation — in the ascension of consciousness the ascent and coming down become easy and ordinary actions and in the definitive realisation of a higher station above there is really no more coming down except with a part of the consciousness which may descend to work in the body or on the lower levels while the permanently high-stationed being above presides over all that is experienced and done.

*

It [*walking around as if in a dream*] is a very usual experience. It means that for a moment you were no longer in your body, but somehow either above or outside the body consciousness. This sometimes happens by the vital being rising up above the head or, more rarely, by its projecting itself into its own sheath (part of the subtle body) out of the physical attachment. But it also comes by a sudden even if momentary liberation from the identification with the body consciousness, and this liberation may become frequent and prolonged or permanent. The body is felt as something separate or some small circumstance in the consciousness or as something one carries about with one etc. etc.; the exact experience varies. Many sadhaks here have had it. When one is accustomed, the strangeness of it (dreamland etc.) disappears.

Fixing the Consciousness Above

It is the aim of the sadhana that the consciousness should rise out of the body and take its station above, — spreading in wideness everywhere, not limited to the body. Thus liberated one opens to all that is above this station, above the ordinary mind, receives there all that descends from the heights, observes from there all that is below. Thus it is possible to witness in all freedom and to control all that is below and to be a recipient or a channel for all that comes down and presses into the body,

which it will prepare to be an instrument of a higher manifestation, remoulded into a higher consciousness and nature.

What is happening in you is that the consciousness is trying to fix itself in this liberation. When one is there in that higher station, one finds the freedom of the Self and the vast silence and immutable calm — but this calm has to be brought down also into the body, into all the lower planes and fix itself there as something standing behind and containing all the movements.

*

It [*a feeling of rising above the head in meditation*] is not merely a sensation; it is an actual happening and a most important one. The consciousness is usually imprisoned in the body, centralised in the brain and heart and navel centres (mental, emotional, sensational); when you feel it or something of it go up and take its station above the head, that is the liberation of the imprisoned consciousness from the body-formula. It is the mental in you that goes up there, gets into touch with something higher than the ordinary mind and from there puts the higher mental will on the rest for transformation. The trembling and the heat come from a resistance, an absence of habituation in the body and the vital to this demand and to this liberation. When the mental consciousness can take its stand permanently or at will above like this, then this first liberation becomes accomplished (*siddha*). From there the mental being can open freely to higher planes or to the cosmic existence and its forces and can also act with greater liberty and power on the lower nature.

*

What you felt was not imagination at all, but the usual experience one has when the consciousness is lifted out of the body and takes its stand above the head. One is no longer bound then by the physical consciousness or the sense of the body — the body becomes only an instrument, a small part of the consciousness which has to be perfected. One enters into a larger free spiritual consciousness in place of the present bound and limited physical consciousness. If this lifting up above the body can be repeated always until it can be maintained, it will be a great landmark in your progress. It is the confinement in the physical consciousness that makes you (and everybody) narrow and selfish and miserable. Hitherto the higher consciousness with its peace etc. has been descending into you with great difficulty and fighting out the vital and physical resistance. If this release upward into the higher consciousness can be maintained, then there will be no longer the same difficulty. Much will still remain to be done, but the foundation will have been made.

*

There are various states of experience in which the expression “taken up out of the body” would be applicable. There is one in which one goes up from the centres in the body to a centre of consciousness extending above the physical head and takes up a position there in which one is liberated from subjection to the body sense and its heavy hold and this is certainly accompanied by a general sense of lightening. One can then be in direct connection with the higher consciousness and its power and action. It is not altogether clear from the description whether this is what happened. Again, there are phenomena of the breathing which accompany states of release or of ascension. But the breath here perhaps stands, generally, for the Life Principle.

Ascent and Change of the Lower Nature

One can remain in the higher consciousness and yet associate oneself with the change of the lower nature. No doubt, it is the Mother’s Force that will do what is necessary, but the consent of the sadhak, the association of his will with her action or at least of his witness vision is necessary also.

*

Your tendency was to go up and to leave the higher consciousness to deal with the lower nature without any personal effort for that. That could have worked all right on two conditions: (1) that the peace and force would come down and occupy all down to the physical, (2) that you succeeded in keeping the inner being unmoved by the outer nature. The physical failed to absorb the peace, inertia arose instead; force could not come down; the suggestions from the outer nature proved too strong for you and between their suggestions and the inertia they interrupted the sadhana.

*

I have not said [*in the preceding letter*] that you made a mistake. I have simply said what happened and the causes. If you had been able to remain above and let the Force come down and act while you were detached from the outer nature, it would have been all right. You were able to go up because the Peace descended. You were not able to remain above because the Peace could not occupy sufficiently the physical and the Force did not descend sufficiently. Meanwhile the inertia arose, you got troubled more and more because of the vital suggestions in the outer nature and the rush of inertia, so you were unable to keep detached and let the Force descend more and more or call it down more and more. Hence the coming down into the physical consciousness.

*

It is simply that when you go high, or within, you enter into a higher consciousness than the ordinary one. Also then one feels the presence of the Divine, for the Divine is always there within and above in every human being. But to divinise the human consciousness entirely needs a long time — for the whole nature from top to bottom must be transformed.

* * *

Chapter Three

The Descent of the Higher Consciousness and Force

The Purpose of the Descent

The descent is that of the powers of the higher consciousness which is above the head. It usually descends from centre to centre till it has occupied the whole being. But at the beginning the action is very variable. It is only when the Peace from above has not only descended but established itself in the whole system that there is a continuous action. The descent comes in order to transform the consciousness but the transformation takes time. It is not done all in a moment.

*

The Force descends for two things:

- (1) To transform the nature.
- (2) To carry on the work through the instrument.

At first one is not conscious of either working, afterwards one becomes conscious of the Force working but not of how it works. Finally one becomes conscious entirely and in detail.

*

Naturally, when any of the higher consciousness descends it works to change the lower consciousness into a part of itself.

Calling in the Higher Consciousness

All limitations [*in one's nature*] can be surmounted, but if they are ingrained in the formation of the present being, it can only be done by calling in a higher power and consciousness than that of the personal mind and will. The higher consciousness can by what it brings correct or rebuild what is defective in the personal nature.

*

The consciousness is always there above you. It is when one opens oneself and calls it that it descends and works — whether in meditation or in work.

*

What comes from above can come when one is in a clear mind or when the vital is disturbed, when one is meditating or when one is moving about, when one is working or when one is doing nothing. Most often it comes when one is in a clear concentrated state, but it may not, — there is no absolute rule. Moreover the pull or call may produce no immediate effect and yet there may be an effect when one is no longer actually pulling or calling. All these mental reasons alleged for its coming or going are too rigid — sometimes they apply, very often they don't apply. One has to have faith, confidence, aspiration but one cannot bind down the Force as to when, how and why it will act.

*

It [*the higher consciousness*] descends in the atmosphere, but for it to be effective the individual must receive and respond. It descends also in the individual independently of the atmosphere.

Preparatory Experiences and Descent

The illumination above the head as usually seen in this Yoga is the Light of the Divine Truth. It is above the head that there is perpetually the Divine Peace, Force, Light, Knowledge, Ananda. These begin to descend into the body when the personal consciousness is prepared sufficiently. The preparation is usually full of vicissitudes such as these [*illness, sleeplessness, an inability to concentrate*] but one has to persist patiently, opening oneself more and more till that is ready.

*

Why should it [*a sense of purity in the being*] be an imagination? When the higher consciousness touches it creates so long as it is there an essential purity in which all parts of the being can share. Or, even if the exterior being does not share actively in it, it may fall quiescent so that there is nothing to interfere with the whole inner being realising the truth of a certain experience. The state does not last because it is only a preparatory touch, not the full or permanent descent; but while it is there it is real. The sex-sensation is of course the thing in the external being, the perversion or false representation in nature, that is the chief obstacle to the experience becoming

frequent and then normal. It usually happens that such an opposite tries to assert itself after an experience.

*

The experiences you have had from above are spiritual experiences. The experience has come, but not yet taken possession of the centres — it is touching them so as to prepare. The Truth consciousness is the consciousness which lives in the Truth or in constant touch with it and not, as the ordinary mind does, in the Ignorance.

*

The experiences you have are a good starting-point for realisation. They have to develop into the light of a deeper state in which there will be the descent of a higher Consciousness into you. Your present consciousness in which you feel these things is only a preparatory one — in which the Mother works in you through the cosmic power according to your state of consciousness and your karma and in that working both success and failure can come — one has to remain equal-minded to both while trying always for success. A surer guidance can come even in this preparatory consciousness if you are entirely turned towards her alone in such a way that you can feel her direct guidance and follow it without any other influence or force intervening to act upon you, but that condition is not easy to get or keep — it needs a great one-pointedness and constant single-minded dedication. When the higher consciousness will descend, then a closer union, a more intimate consciousness of the Presence and a more illumined intuition will become possible.

*

It is good. The more you keep that dominant sense of the force and the calmness and increase it, the more the other feeling [*of inadequacy and restlessness*] will diminish and fade. It always happens that at first the Power and Peace only press, touch, invade at places, until a time comes when a part of the being always feels in that condition however much disturbance may assail the surface. Afterwards the disturbance is more and more pushed out till it is felt only outside the being, not in it. When that too goes, there is the complete peace and the full foundation.

*

Your letter of today makes it very clear what is happening. The Force that you felt had come down at first, came to open the way for the descent of the higher consciousness into the mind and body. That was why it descended with such force

and the difficulty of holding or assimilating it was simply because the body was unaccustomed. But as often happens the Force is preparing its own reception and habituating the body to the descent. Having done that sufficiently it is coming down as a massive peace. The higher consciousness in its descent takes several fundamental forms — peace, power and strength, light, knowledge, Ananda. Usually it is the peace that descends first. This is not a mental, vital or physical peace of the ordinary kind, but something from above (spiritual), very firm, solid and concrete. It is its concreteness that makes you feel like a still massive block — a mass of the higher consciousness in place of the more tenuous substance of the ordinary nature. As for its being worth having, you can see that it is — it is indeed the beginning of the real transformation — all the rest hitherto has been mainly preparation and clearing of difficulties and impediments through all these years. This serene peace and massive stillness has to stabilise itself, fill the whole nature, widen itself until all existence internal and external seems full of it. This may take time, but the beginning once there it is sure to take place, if one is steady and constant. It becomes besides the sure base on which all the rest, — power and strength, light and knowledge, Ananda and divine love, can come in and securely fill the consciousness.

The usual mental means to widen the consciousness is to think of and feel oneself as spreading out into space beyond the body — as a corrective to the thought and feeling of oneself as identified with the body and shut up in it. After a time this leads to a substantial experience of wide consciousness beyond the body. The means to quieten the physical consciousness is to detach oneself from all restless vibrations, not by any struggle or effort but by a simple easy will of quietude. However now that the higher Force is bringing quietude, these mental means may not be necessary — for the peace from above usually brings the wideness of the self — though for some it brings it at once, for others it takes time.

Anyhow, the spiritual opening has been clearly made in you; the rest is a matter of development and time.

The Order of Descent into the Being

It [*the higher consciousness*] enters usually first into the mind, then into the vital and then into the body, because it is these that have to be changed and that is the natural order.

*

Whatever comes from above the head, whether it is Presence, Peace, Ananda, or anything else, normally descends into the head first, then after occupying all the mental centres it comes down into the heart and from there goes down into the vital

centres and occupies the whole body. If there is a resistance, it is felt as a weight and a pressure — when the way is open, the pressure disappears and there is only the thing itself. It enters each centre as soon as the way to it is open.

*

The Force usually comes down through the head and afterwards descends lower in the body to the heart, afterwards through the navel downwards.

The sadhak becomes restless under the Force only if he resists it — otherwise it brings peace and calm and happiness and strength.

It is probably some other part of the mind — the vital mind or physical mind — it is these usually that resist.

*

Usually the descent in the head helps to quiet the mind.

*

If you mean the descent of the higher consciousness, that is felt in the heart region, not only in the centre, just as it is felt in the head. The touching of the head is only a first pressure. Afterwards there is a feeling of a mass of peace, force, light, Ananda or consciousness coming down in the head directly and descending further to the chest and so to the navel and through the body. For some it takes weeks or months, in others it descends rapidly.

*

Yes, it was the same experience [*as an earlier one*]. You went inside under the pressure of the Force — which is often though not always the first result — went into a few seconds' samadhi according to the ordinary language. The Force when it descends tries to open the body and pass through the centres. It has to come in (ordinarily) through the crown of the head (Brahmarandhra) and pass through the inner mind centre which is in the middle of the forehead between the eyebrows. That is why it presses first on the head. The opening of the eyes brings one back to the ordinary consciousness of the outer world, that is why the intensity is relieved by opening the eyes.

*

When things come in this order the head opens up first and the heart afterwards — finally all the centres. So what is there to be concerned about?¹ If you are satisfied only with peace, knowledge and mukti, then perhaps the heart centre may open to that only. But if you want the love, then the descending Power and Light will work for that also. So cheer up and don't get into a state of pother with imaginary difficulties.

*

The descent into the body first in the head, then down to the neck and in the chest is the ordinary rule. For many there is a big stop before it gets below the navel owing to some vital resistance. Once it passes that barricade it does not usually take long to come down farther. But there is no rule as to the time taken. In some it comes down like a flood, in others it goes through with a methodical and deliberate increase. I don't think the peace descent is in the habit of waiting for companions — more often it likes at first to be all by itself and then call down its friends with the message, "Come along, I have made the place all ready for you."

*

It is possible that there may have been too much haste in this attempt to open the navel and the lower centre. In this Yoga the movement is downward — first the two head centres, then the heart, then the navel and then the two others. If the higher experience is first fully established with its higher consciousness, knowledge and will in the three upper centres, then it is easier to open the three lower ones without too much disturbance.

The Effect of Descent into the Lower Planes

When a higher force comes down into a lower plane, it is diminished and modified by the inferior substance, lesser power and more mixed movements of that lower plane. Thus, if the Overmind Power works through the illumined mind, only part of its truth and force can manifest and be effective — so much only as can get through this less receptive consciousness. And even what gets through is less true, mixed with other matter, less overmental, more easily modified into something that is part truth, part error. When this diminished indirect Force descends farther down into the mind and vital, it has still something of the Overmind creative Truth in it, but gets very badly mixed with mental and vital formations that disfigure it and make it half effective only, sometimes ineffective.

*

1. *The correspondent was concerned that he might receive knowledge but not love since his head centre seemed to be opening before his heart centre. — Ed.*

(1) Part of it [*the descending higher consciousness*] is stored up in the frontal consciousness and remains there.

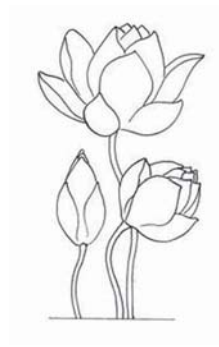
(2) Part of it goes behind and remains as a support to the active part of the being.

(3) Part flows out into the universal Nature.

(4) Part is absorbed by the Inconscient and lost to the individual conscious action.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga – III*, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 428-48)



‘IN THE SILENCE I BEHELD THY INFINITE AND ETERNAL BEATITUDE’

May 26, 1914

On the surface is the storm, the sea is in turmoil, waves clash and leap one on another and break with a mighty uproar. But all the time, under this water in fury, are vast smiling expanses, peaceful and motionless. They look upon the surface agitation as an indispensable act; for matter has to be vigorously churned if it is to become capable of manifesting entirely the divine light. Behind the troubled appearance, behind the struggle and anguish of the conflict, the consciousness remains firm at its post; observing all the movements of the outer being, it intervenes only to rectify direction and position, so as not to allow the play to become too dramatic. This intervention is now firm and a little severe, now ironical, a call to order or a mockery, full always of a strong, gentle, peaceful and smiling benevolence.

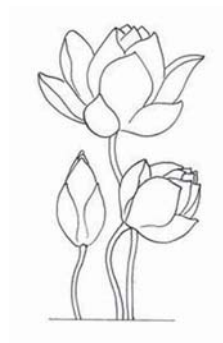
In the silence I beheld Thy infinite and eternal Beatitude.

Then softly a prayer rises towards Thee from what is still in the shadow and the struggle: O sweet Master, O supreme Giver of illumination and purity, grant that all substance and every activity may be no more anything other than a constant manifestation of Thy divine Love and Thy sovereign Serenity. . . .

And in my heart is the song of gladness of Thy sublime magnificence.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 157)



ON THE DHAMMAPADA

The Mind

Just as the arrow-maker straightens his arrows, so also the intelligent man straightens his thoughts, wavering and fickle, difficult to keep straight, difficult to master.

Just as a fish cast out of the water, our mind quivers and gasps when it leaves behind the kingdom of Mara.

Difficult to master and unstable is the mind, forever in search of pleasure. It is good to govern it. A mind that is controlled brings happiness.

The sage should remain master of his thoughts, for they are subtle and difficult to seize and always in search of pleasure. A mind that is well guided brings happiness.

Wandering afar, solitary, bodiless and hidden in the deep cave of the heart, such is the mind. Whosoever succeeds in bringing it under control liberates himself from the fetters of Mara.

The intelligence of one whose mind is unstable, who is ignorant of the true Law, and whose faith is wavering will never be able to develop.

If a man's thoughts are not agitated, if his mind is not troubled by desire, if he no longer cares for good and evil, this man, wide awake, knows nothing of fear.

Observing that the body is as fragile as a jar, and fortifying the mind like a city at arms, one should attack Mara with the blade of intelligence and should guard carefully whatever has been won.

Before long this body will be lying on the earth, abandoned, as lifeless as a piece of old wood.

Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, whatever a hater may do to a hater, the harm caused by a misdirected mind is even greater still.

Neither mother nor father nor any other kinsman can do so much good as a well-directed mind.

These few verses correspond to all the needs of those whose mind has not been mastered. They point out the attachment that one has to one's old ways of being, thinking and reacting, even when one is trying to get away from them. As soon as you emerge by your effort, you are like a fish out of water and you gasp for breath because you are no longer in your element of obscure desires.

Even when you make a resolution, the mind remains unstable. It is subtle, difficult to seize. Without seeming to do so, it is continually seeking its own satisfaction; and its intentions are hidden in the core of the heart so as not to show their true nature.

And while not forgetting the weakness of the body, you must try to strengthen the mind against its own weakness; with the sword of wisdom, you must fight against the hostile forces and treasure the progress you have made so that these forces may not despoil you of your progress, for they are terrible thieves.

And then there is a short couplet for those who are afraid of death, intended to liberate them from that fear. Finally there is a last short couplet for those who are attached to their family to show them the vanity of this attachment.

In the end, a last warning: an ill-directed, ill-controlled thought does more harm than an enemy can do to an enemy or a hater to a hater. That is to say, even those who have the best intentions in the world, if they do not have a wise control over their thought, will do more harm to themselves and to those whom they love than an enemy can do to an enemy or a hater to a hater.

The mind has a power of deception in its own regard which is incalculable. It clothes its desires and preferences with all kinds of wonderful intentions and it hides its trickeries, resentments and disappointments under the most favourable appearances.

To overcome all that, you must have the fearlessness of a true warrior, and an honesty, a straightforwardness, a sincerity that never fail.

28 February 1958

The Flowers

Who will conquer this world of illusion and the kingdom of Yama and the world of the gods? Who will discover the path of the Law as the skilled gardener discovers the rarest of flowers?

The disciple on the right path will conquer this world of illusion and the kingdom of Yama and the world of the gods. He will discover the path of the Law as the skilled gardener discovers the rarest of flowers.

Knowing his body to be as impermanent as foam and as illusory as a mirage, the disciple on the right path will shatter the flowery arrow of Mara and will rise beyond the reach of the King of Death.

Death carries away the man who seeks only the flowers of sensual pleasure just as torrential floods carry away a sleeping village.

Death, the destroyer, overcomes the man who seeks only the flowers of sensual pleasure before he can satisfy himself.

The sage should go from door to door in his village, as the bee gathers honey from the flowers without bringing harm to their colours or their fragrance.

Do not criticise others for what they do or have not done, but be aware of what, yourself, you do or have not done.

Just as a beautiful flower which is radiant yet lacks fragrance, so are the beautiful words of one who does not act accordingly.

Just as a beautiful flower which is both radiant and sweetly scented, so are the beautiful words of one who acts accordingly.

Just as many garlands can be made from a heap of flowers, so a mortal can accumulate much merit by good deeds.

The fragrance of flowers, even that of sandalwood or of incense, even that of jasmine, cannot go against the wind; but the sweet fragrance of intelligence goes against the wind. All around the man of intelligence spreads the fragrance of his virtue.

No fragrance, not even that of sandalwood or incense, nor of the lotus nor of jasmine, can be compared with the fragrance of intelligence.

Weak is the fragrance of incense or sandalwood compared to that of a virtuous man which reaches up to the highest of divinities.

Mara cannot discover the way that those beings follow who lead a life of perfect purity and who are liberated by their total knowledge.

As the beautiful scented lily rises by the wayside, even so the disciple of the Perfectly Enlightened One, radiant with intelligence, rises from the blind and ignorant multitude.

There are some very wise recommendations here, for example, not to concern oneself with what others do nor with the mistakes they make, but to attend to one's own faults and negligences and rectify them. Another wise counsel is never to utter too many eloquent words which are not effectuated in action — speak little, act well. Beautiful words, they say, that are mere words, are like flowers without fragrance.

And finally, lest you get discouraged by your own faults, the Dhammapada gives you this solacing image: the purest lily can spring out of a heap of rubbish by the wayside. That is to say, there is nothing so rotten that it cannot give birth to the purest realisation.

Whatever may be the past, whatever may be the faults committed, whatever the ignorance in which one might have lived, one carries deep within oneself the supreme purity which can translate itself into a wonderful realisation.

The whole point is to think of that, to concentrate on that and not to be concerned with all the difficulties and obstacles and hindrances.

Concentrate exclusively on what you want to be, forget as entirely as possible what you do not want to be.

7 March 1958

The Fool

Long is the night for one who sleeps not; long is the road for one who is weary; long is the cycle of births for the fool who knows not the true law.

If a man cannot find a companion who is his superior or even his equal, he should resolutely follow a solitary path; for no good can come from companionship with a fool.

The fool torments himself by thinking, "This son is mine, this wealth is mine." How can he possess sons and riches, who does not possess himself?

The fool who recognises his foolishness is at least wise in that. But the fool who thinks he is intelligent, is a fool indeed.

Even if the fool serves an intelligent man throughout his life, he will nevertheless remain ignorant of the truth, just as the spoon knows not the taste of the soup.

If an intelligent man serves a wise man, if only for a moment, he will quickly understand the truth, just as the tongue instantly perceives the savour of the soup.

The fools, those who are ignorant, have no worse enemies than themselves; bitter is the fruit they gather from their evil actions.

The evil action which one repents later brings only regrets and the fruit one reaps will be tears and lamentations.

The good action one does not need to repent later brings no regret and the fruit one reaps will be contentment and satisfaction.

As long as the evil action has not borne its fruits, the fool imagines that it is as sweet as honey. But when this action bears its fruits, he reaps only suffering.

Though month after month the fool takes his food with the tip of a blade of Kusa grass, he is not for all that worth a sixteenth part of one who has understood the truth.

An evil action does not yield its fruits immediately, just as milk does not at once turn sour; but like a fire covered with ashes, even so smoulders the evil action.

Whatever vain knowledge a fool may have been able to acquire, it leads him only to his ruin, for it breaks his head and destroys his worthier nature.

The foolish monk thirsts after reputation, and a high rank among the Bhikkhus, after authority in the monastery and veneration from ordinary men.

“Let ordinary men and holy ones esteem highly what I have done; let them obey me!” This is the longing of the fool, whose pride increases more and more.

One path leads to earthly gain and quite another leads to Nirvana. Knowing this, the Bhikkhu, the disciple of the Perfectly Enlightened One, longs no more for honour, but rather cultivates solitude.

This seems to point directly to hypocrites who take up the external forms and appearances of wisdom but in their hearts keep all the desires, ambitions, the need for show, and live to satisfy this ambition and these desires instead of living for the only thing that is worth living for: attainment of the true consciousness, integral self-giving to the Divine, the peace, the light and the delight that come from the true wisdom and self-forgetfulness.

One could easily replace throughout this text the word fool by the word ego. One who lives in his ego, for his ego, in the hope of satisfying his ego is a fool. Unless you transcend ego, unless you reach a state of consciousness in which ego has no reason for existing, you cannot hope to attain the goal.

The ego seems to have been indispensable at one time for the formation of the individual consciousness, but with the ego were born all the obstacles, sufferings, difficulties, all that now appears to us as adverse and anti-divine forces. But these forces themselves were a necessity for attaining an inner purification and the liberation from ego. The ego is at once the result of their action and the cause of their prolongation. When the ego disappears, the adverse forces will also disappear, having no longer any reason for their existence in the world.

With the inner liberation, with a total sincerity and perfect purity, all suffering will disappear, because it will no longer be necessary for the progress of the consciousness towards its final goal.

Wisdom, then, consists in working energetically at the inner transformation so that you may emerge victorious from a struggle which will have borne its fruits but will no longer have any need to exist.

14 March 1958

The Sage

We should seek the company of the sage who shows us our faults, as if he were showing us a hidden treasure; it is best to cultivate relations with such a man because he cannot be harmful to us. He will bring us only good.

One who exhorts us to good and dissuades us from doing evil is appreciated, esteemed by the just man and hated by the unjust.

Do not seek the company or friendship of men of base character, but let us consort with men of worth and let us seek friendship with the best among men.

He who drinks directly from the source of the Teaching lives happy in serenity of mind. The sage delights always in the Teaching imparted by the noble disciples of the Buddha.

Those who build waterways lead the water where they want; those who make arrows straighten them; carpenters shape their wood; the sage controls himself.

No more than a mighty rock can be shaken by the wind, can the sage be moved by praise or blame.

The sage who has steeped himself in the Teaching, becomes perfectly peaceful like a deep lake, calm and clear.

Wherever he may be, the true sage renounces all pleasures. Neither sorrow nor happiness can move him.

Neither for his own sake, nor for the sake of others does the sage desire children, riches or domains. He does not aim for his own success by unjust ways. Such a man is virtuous, wise and just.

Few men cross to the other shore. Most men remain and do no more than run up and down along this shore.

But those who live according to the Teaching cross beyond the realm of Death, however difficult may be the passage.

The sage will leave behind the dark ways of existence, but he will follow the way of light. He will leave his home for the homeless life and in solitude will seek the joy which is so difficult to find.

Having renounced all desires and attachments of the senses, the sage will cleanse himself of all the taints of the mind.

One whose mind is well established in all the degrees of knowledge, who, detached from all things, delights in his renunciation, and who has mastered his appetites, he is resplendent, and even in this world he attains Nirvana.

There is a sentence here which is particularly felicitous. It is the very first sentence we have read, "We should seek the company of the sage who shows us our faults, as if he were showing us a hidden treasure."

In all Scriptures meant to help mankind to progress, it is always said that you must be very grateful to those who show you your faults and so you must seek their company; but the form used here is particularly felicitous: if a fault is shown to you it is as if a treasure were shown to you; that is to say, each time that you discover in yourself a fault, incapacity, lack of understanding, weakness, insincerity, all that

prevents you from making a progress, it is as if you discovered a wonderful treasure.

Instead of growing sad and telling yourself, “Oh, there is still another defect”, you should, on the contrary, rejoice as if you had made a wonderful acquisition, because you have just caught hold of one of those things that prevented you from progressing. And once you have caught hold of it, pull it out! For those who practise a yogic discipline consider that the moment you know that a thing should not be, you have the power to remove it, discard it, destroy it.

To discover a fault is an acquisition. It is as though a flood of light had come to replace the little speck of obscurity which has just been driven out.

When you follow a yogic discipline, you must not accept this weakness, this baseness, this lack of will, which means that knowledge is not immediately followed by power. To know that a thing should not be and yet continue to allow it to be is such a sign of weakness that it is not accepted in any serious discipline, it is a lack of will that verges on insincerity. You know that a thing should not be and the moment you know it, you are the one who decides that it shall not be. For knowledge and power are essentially the same thing — that is to say, you must not admit in any part of your being this shadow of bad will which is in contradiction to the central will for progress and which makes you impotent, without courage, without strength in the face of an evil that you must destroy.

To sin through ignorance is not a sin; that is part of the general evil in the world as it is, but to sin when you know, that is serious. It means that there is hidden somewhere, like a worm in the fruit, an element of bad will that must be hunted out and destroyed, at any cost, because any weakness on such a point is the source of difficulties that sometimes, later on, become irreparable.

So then the first thing is to be perfectly happy when someone or some circumstance puts you in the conscious presence of a fault in yourself which you did not know. Instead of lamenting, you must rejoice and in this joy must find the strength to get rid of the thing which should not be.

21 March 1958

The Adept

No sorrow exists for one who has completed his journey, who has let fall all cares, who is free in all his parts, who has cast off all bonds.

Those who are heedful strive always and, like swans leaving their lakes, leave one home after another.

Those who amass nothing, who eat moderately, who have perceived the emptiness of all things and who have attained unconditioned liberation, their path is as difficult to trace as that of a bird in the air.

One for whom all desires have passed away and who has perceived the emptiness of all things, who cares little for food, who has attained unconditioned liberation, his path is as difficult to trace as that of a bird in the air.

Even the Gods esteem one whose senses are controlled as horses by the charioteer, one who is purged of all pride and freed from all corruption.

One who fulfils his duty is as immovable as the earth itself. He is as firm as a celestial pillar, pure as an unmuddied lake; and for him the cycle of births is completed.

Calm are the thoughts, the words and the acts of one who has liberated himself by the true knowledge and has achieved a perfect tranquillity.

The greatest among men is he who is not credulous but has the sense of the Uncreated, who has cut all ties, who has destroyed all occasion for rebirth.

Whether village or forest, plain or mountain, wherever the adepts may dwell, that place is always delightful.

Delightful are the forests which are shunned by the multitude. There, the adept, who is free from passion, will find happiness, for he seeks not after pleasure.

There is a very interesting sentence here: “He who is not credulous but has the sense of the Uncreated. . . .”

One who is not credulous — all kinds of things can be understood from this word. The first impression is that it refers to one who does not believe in invisible things without having an experience of them, as distinct from people who follow, for example, a particular religion and have faith in dogmas simply because that is what they have been taught. But he “has the sense of the Uncreated”, that is to say, he is in contact with invisible things and knows them as they are, by identity. The Dhammapada has told us, to begin with, that the greatest of men is he who has no faith in what is taught but has a personal experience of things that are not visible, he who is free from all belief and has himself had the experience of invisible things.

Another explanation can also be given: one who is not credulous is he who does not believe in the reality of appearances, in things as we see them, who does not take them for the truth, who knows that these are only misleading appearances

and that behind them lies a truth that is to be found and known by personal experience and by identity.

And this makes one reflect on the number of things, the countless number of things that we believe without any personal knowledge, simply because we have been taught that they are like that, or because we are accustomed to think they are like that, or because we are surrounded by people who believe that things are like that. If we look at all the things that we believe and not only believe but assert with an indisputable authority, “This is like this”, “That, but of course it is like that”, “And this thing, yes, it is so. . . .” In truth, however, we know nothing about it, it is simply because we are in the habit of thinking that they are like that. What are the things that you have experienced personally, with which you have had a direct contact, of which you can at least say with sincerity, “I am convinced that it is like that, because I have experienced it”? Not many.

In reality, if you truly want to have knowledge, you must begin by making a very important study: verify the things that we have been taught, even the most common and the most insignificant. Then you will understand why the text says “the greatest among men”, because I do not think that many have made this experiment.

Just to find out the number of things we believe and assert, simply because it is customary to believe and assert them, is indeed a very interesting discovery.

Now go and look into your thought and consciousness for all the things that you assert without proof. You will see!

28 March 1958

The Thousands

Better than a thousand words devoid of meaning is a single meaningful word which can bring tranquillity to one who hears it.

Better than a thousand verses devoid of meaning is a single meaningful verse which can bring tranquillity to one who hears it.

Better than the repetition of a hundred verses devoid of meaning is the repetition of a single verse of the Teaching which can bring tranquillity to one who hears it.

The greatest conqueror is not he who is victorious over thousands of men in battle, but he who is victorious over himself.

The victory that one wins over oneself is of more value than victory over all the peoples.

No god, no Gandharva, nor Mara nor Brahma can change that victory to defeat.

If, month after month, for a hundred years one offers sacrifices by the thousand, and if for a single instant one offers homage to a being full of wisdom, that single homage is worth more than all those countless sacrifices.

If for a hundred years a man tends the flame on Agni's altar, and if, for a single instant, he renders homage to a man who has mastered his nature, this brief homage has more value than all his long devotions.

Whatever the sacrifices and oblations a man in this world may offer throughout a whole year in order to acquire merit, that is not worth even a quarter of the homage offered to a just man.

For one who is respectful to his elders, four things increase: long life, beauty, happiness and strength.

A single day spent in good conduct and meditation is worth more than a hundred years spent in immorality and dissipation.

A single day of wisdom and meditation is worth more than a hundred years spent in foolishness and dissipation.

A single day of strength and energy is worth more than a hundred years spent in indolence and inertia.

A single day lived in the perception that all things appear and disappear is worth more than a hundred years spent not knowing that they appear and disappear.

A single day spent in contemplation of the path of immortality is worth more than a hundred years lived in ignorance of the path of immortality.

A single day spent in contemplation of the supreme Truth is worth more than a hundred years lived in ignorance of the supreme Truth.

All kinds of different things are gathered here under the same heading. It is an association of words more than an association of ideas. But the central trend is this, that it is preferable to have one moment of sincerity rather than a long life of apparent devotion and that a psychological and spiritual victory over oneself is more important than all external victories.

There is also an interesting reflection, that a victory over oneself is the only victory which is truly safe from the intervention of any god or power of Nature or any instrument of evil. If you have gained self-mastery on one point, that goes beyond the reach of any intervention even from the very highest powers, whether they are gods of the Overmind or any anti-divine powers in the world.

The opening text says that a single word that gives you peace is worth more than thousands of words that have no meaning — this anybody can understand — but it is also said that the word that gives you peace is worth more than thousands of words that can satisfy the mental activity but have no psychological effect on your being.

Indeed, when you have found something which has the power to help you in gaining a victory over your unconsciousness and inertia, you must, till you reach the final result, exhaust all the effects produced by that word or phrase before you look for others.

It is more important to pursue to its end the practice of the effect produced by an idea that one has met somehow, than to try to accumulate in the head a large number of ideas. Ideas may all be very useful in their own time, if they are allowed in at the opportune moment, particularly if you carry to the extreme limit the result of one of those dynamic ideas that are capable of making you win an inner victory. That is to say, one should have for one's chief, if not only aim the practice of what one knows rather than the accumulation in oneself of a knowledge which remains purely theoretical.

So one could sum up: put into practice integrally what you know, only then can you usefully increase your theoretical knowledge.

11 April 1958

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 210-28)

THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATING HOMER

Sri Aurobindo has framed a theory of what he calls true quantitative verse in English and amply illustrated it with nearly 5000 lines unravelling the greatest knot of the difficulty: the hexameter. His theory, which he designates “realistic”, can be summed up in its whole base with four rules or sets of rules:¹

(1) All stressed syllables are metrically long, as are also all long-vowel syllables even without stress.

All short-vowel syllables are metrically short, unless they are lengthened by stress — or else by a sufficient weight of consonants or some other lengthening sound-element; but the mere fact of more than one consonant coming after a short vowel, whether within the word or after it, or both in combination, is not sufficient to confer length upon the syllable. Heaviness caused by a crowding of consonants affects the rhythm of a line or part of a line but does not alter its metrical values.

Each word has its own metrical value which cannot be radically influenced or altered by the word that follows.

(2) The English language has many sounds which are doubtful or variable in quantity; these may be sometimes used as short and sometimes as long according to circumstance. Here the ear must be the judge.

(3) Quantity within the syllable itself is not so rigidly fixed as in the ancient languages; often position or other circumstances may alter the metrical value of a syllable. A certain latitude has to be conceded in such cases, and there again the ear must be the judge.

(4) Quantity metres cannot be as rigid and unalterable in English as in the old classical tongues; for the movement of the language is pliant and flexible and averse to rigidity and monotone. English poetry has always a fundamental metrical basis, a fixed normality of the feet constituting a line; but it relieves the fixity by the use of modulations substituting, with sometimes a less, sometimes a greater freedom, other feet for the normal. This rule of variation, very occasionally admitted in the classical tongues but natural in English poetry, must be applied or at least permitted in quantitative metres also; otherwise, in poems of some length, their rhythms may become stereotyped in a too rigid sameness and fatigue the ear.

No other rules than these four need be laid down, for the rest must be left

to individual choice and skill in technique.

With the advent of the Aurobindonian hexameter in tune with the genius of English as well as catching the temper of the classical medium, the vexed question of translating Homer into truly responsive English verse has received at last an answer. Interestingly enough, in his early days Sri Aurobindo himself attempted a set translation of the *Odyssey*.² But he did not carry on and what remains is only a few opening passages, and these too in a rough unrevised draft. The first ten lines seem the best and we may quote them for their cumulative effect of the Homeric “how” of saying things:

Sing to me, Muse, of the man many-counselled who far through the world's
ways
Wandering was tossed after Troya he sacked, the divine stronghold,
Many cities of men he beheld, learned the minds of their dwellers,
Many the woes in his soul he suffered driven on the waters,
Fending from fate his life and the homeward course of his comrades.
Them even so he saved not for all his desire and his striving;
Who by their own infatuate madness piteously perished,
Fools in their hearts! for they slew the herds the deity pastured,
Helios high-climbing; but he from them reft their return and the daylight.
Sing to us also of these things, goddess, daughter of heaven.

From the artistic viewpoint the *Odyssey* is a particularly difficult poem to translate; for, has not Sri Aurobindo spoken of “the *Odyssey* and perhaps the *Divina Commedia* being the only exceptions” to the fact that all the great epics achieve greatness in spite of “deficiencies if not failures” in them?³ The proper form to keep the needed inspiration winging as intensely as possible is all the more required. And, from the lines quoted, one may see the appropriateness of the form chosen. The opening pair may be briefly commented on.

The first is trisyllabic in all the five feet preceding the final one, but with no mechanical regularity. They broadly indicate the lengthy labour of varied journeying undergone by a particular individual noted for certain qualities. But in two places the indication is brought to a significant head, as it were. While “Sing to me” and “Muse of the” and “counselled who” are each a dactyl (long-short-short), the third foot — “man many” — is, by Sri Aurobindo’s system, an anti-bacchius (long-long-short) in which quantitative length is created purely by stress-strokes: it metrically dwells on the hero’s multi-aspected competence of mind, packs home his weight of wisdom and subtly suggests his fitness for what he was made to do. Again, what he was made to do is rendered equally living by a special effect in the fifth foot — “far through the” — which balances the third by immediately coming on the heels of the

whole phrase dealing with the man concerned. This also is an anti-bacchius but mainly by an intrinsic quantitative stretch-out and it climaxes the suggestion of the sustained movement across space and time by the hero. The line's sixth foot — "world's ways" — is an emphatic spondee, a couple of syllables not only having a long or lengthened vowel but also bearing stresses and conjuring up with a culminating precision a sense both of the wide persistent travel and of the deep diverse travail. Here we may note in addition the alliterative *w*'s and proceed to mark the picking up of the alliteration by the opening word of the next line: "Wandering." Not merely is the idea of continual going hither and thither upon land and sea enforced: a sound-support is given to the significance by the triple repetition of the letter *w* which has a certain expansive effect well-known to the sensitive poetic ear, as in Wordsworth's

the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,

and Sri Aurobindo's

In the wide workshop of the wonderful world.

The line starting with "Wandering" links up rhythmically with its predecessor through a single anti-bacchius once more — "tossed after" — as well as by a dactyl ("Troja he") in the third foot. But the initial foot ("Wandering was") is a first-paeon (long-short-short-short) which, coming immediately after the preceding line's anti-bacchius and spondee, adds another shade to the motif of travel and travail — a movement with a pressure plunging as if into thin air again and again. The second line closes with three dissyllables — the first a natural trochee, the second a spondee by an accent-shift to the first syllable such as English scansion practises with some words and by an intrinsically long accent-deprived second syllable, the third foot a spondee yet a little different from the one before it no less than from the terminal of the opening line, being stressed only in the first of its two intrinsically long components:

sacked the | divine | stronghold

Nor is this trio of dissyllables a mere variation: it meaningfully covers the mention of the past magnitude of the city Odysseus left in ruins before he started tossing to and fro on the waters. The rhythmic pace is slowed down and at the end brought to a standstill with the very word connoting the original firm-foundedness of Troja which had been built by Apollo's art. Quite a host of expressive effects are set together, interacting among themselves within a billowy sweep and swirl whose changing rhythms, for all their separate roles, are basically harmonious as in Homer's original.

Unaware of the right mould found by Sri Aurobindo, a writer in the *Times Literary Supplement* (March 8, 1963) wrote in a front-page article⁴ apropos of translating Homer: “There is no equivalent between a metrical six-foot line [i.e. the quantitative hexameter] and one dependent on stress, but the technique developed by Mr. Day Lewis and Professor Lattimore has proved more successful than most . . .” Now, to have a true measure of the claimed success we have only to take the reviewer’s quotation of Lattimore’s rendering of the first line of Homer’s famous passage in the *Iliad* about the descent of Apollo to avenge the Greeks’ insult to his high-priest Chryses:

Be de kat’ Oulumpoio karenon choomenos ker.

Lattimore writes:

And strode down along the pinnacles of Olympus, angered in his heart . . .

Sri Aurobindo, in the course of discussing certain Homeric habits — stock descriptions, epithets always reiterated, lines even which are constantly repeated again and again when the same incident returns in the narrative — happens to quote the very phrase and to English it:

Down from the peaks of Olympus he came wrath vexing his heart-strings.

Sri Aurobindo has sacrificed strict literalness at the end but the fundamental Homeric spirit and sound are there — and perhaps all the more by that extra poetic touch to match the Greek splendour of word. In Lattimore we feel a smothering of the needed qualities. Day Lewis has not tried his hand at Homer, but we have his very readable Virgil, with some excellent responses in places yet lacking the sense of the right body to make such responses organic to the inspiration. We may test him in one of Virgil’s most memorable moments, which Sri Aurobindo too has translated in passing, while helping a disciple in the art of the caesura. Virgil, in the midst of describing a storm and the wreck of the ships of Aeneas, breaks into a line of universal appeal, the soul of all humanity speaking poignantly and profoundly:

O passi graviora! dabit deus his quoque finem.

Day Lewis gets something of the poignancy but it is not verbally subtle enough or rhythmically keen enough to cut down into profundity:

Worse than this you have suffered. God will end all this too.⁵

Listen now to Sri Aurobindo:

Fiercer griefs you have suffered; to these too God will give ending.

The world-cry is here in its full resonance. No doubt, a greater poetic voice is in action, but it secures the supreme Virgilian fulfilment by finding for the Latin verse's absolute inevitability the right metrical mould in English.

Wherever Day Lewis strikes upon that mould by poetic instinct he brings off the right hexametrical note, as in rendering Virgil's

Prospexi Italiam summa sublimis ab unda

by

Caught sight of Italy, being lifted high on a wave crest.⁶

There we have in the initial anti-bacchius a natural Aurobindonian modulation which would be absent from the common English imitation of Virgil's form or would have to be artificially passed off as a dactyl. Much more of this success would have been present if Day Lewis had been aware of the correct technical requirements.

What is true about Day Lewis's metre applies also to the line chosen by Kimon Friar in his translation of Nikos Kazantzakis's Greek epic, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*. In Friar's view, this line of six stresses on a predominantly iambic base best corresponds in English to the original of seventeen syllables and eight iambic beats.⁷ Friar is correct; but that original has served Kazantzakis as well to render Homer's poems, into modern Greek.⁸ So, in face of the proverbial difficulty of Englishing the Homeric hexameter, Friar may be assumed to believe that his English equivalent of Kazantzakis's own composition would suit an English version of Homer. There is no denying that Friar has produced remarkable effects again and again in his translation; yet what communicates Kazantzakis cannot be said to communicate Homer from the technical and rhythmical point of view. And the skilful modulations Friar plays on his alexandrine blank verse show up the unsuitableness of the fundamental line for Homer by juxtaposing it with approximations to Homer's tone itself. Here is a passage from Book 1:⁹

A mild breeze blew on ringlets of a yellow brow,
somewhere amid an olive tree a nightbird sighed,
soft seawaves far away on the smooth shingles murmured
and happy night in her first sleep mumbled in dream.
Telemachus then turned to his harsh-speaking lord:
"Father, your eyes are brimmed with blood, your fists are smoking!"

The cruel man-slayer grabbed his son and roared with laughter:
two crows on two black branches shook with fright, and fled,
and in the court an old oak swayed with all its stars.

Immediately we can pick out four lines as Homeric in movement, the second and third of them completely so, the first and fourth just wanting one foot at the end, and all of them are unconsciously Aurobindonian quantitative hexameters with their many kinds of legitimised variations:

soft sea|waves far a|way on the | smooth shingles | murmured . . .
“Father, your | eyes are | brimmed with | blood, your | fists are | smoking! |”
The cruel | man-slayer | grabbed his | son and | roared with | laughter:
two crows on | two black | branches | shook with | fright, and fled . . .

The one writer who in the past has come nearest to the hexameter of Homer or Virgil in English is not Friar or Lewis or Lattimore: it is H. B. Cotterill. In 1911 he published his translation of the *Odyssey*.¹⁰ Rejecting academic attempts to construct the Homeric or Virgilian line on the principles of Classical quantity without attention to the natural English stress, he accepts the accentual hexameter as practised by Southey, Lockhart, Longfellow, Kingsley and Clough but adds:¹¹ “most unfortunately, many of the advocates of the ‘accentual’ against the ‘quantitative hexameter’ . . . have made a fatal mistake in maintaining that quantity (length, weight) does not exist at all in English, or, if it does, that it is a *quantité négligeable*. Anyhow, my ear has become ever more and more impatient of the ordinary English hexameter with its disregard of quantity — the beauty and vigour of a line seeming to me to depend mainly on the coincidence of quantity and accent, and on the use of true spondees and dactyls.” These are wise words but not sufficiently so, for it would be hardly possible to maintain for any desirable length a coincidence of quantity and accent. Cotterill himself strikes a compromise when he comes to tabulate his rules. For, he¹² wants his accents to fall either on long syllables or on those “weighted with meaning when somewhat short in pronunciation” and his “slacks” or unaccented syllables to be either short or “light, unemphatic . . . and never (even if short in pronunciation) any monosyllable or dissyllable that makes one pause to think such as a verb, a noun, or an adjective”. Face to face with these rules, we shall have to make-do often enough not only with intrinsic shorts in place of the old longs but also with intrinsic longs in place of the old shorts. The principles of quantity grow rather a hotchpotch in this scheme: consistency and order could come only if the accented shorts and the unaccented longs are put on a parity with the accented longs as metrical elements and as foot-builders. Of course, how and when this or that element is to be employed would rest with the inspired ear. But to leave any of these three out would be to falsify the truth of the hexametrical spirit. And then the insistence on mere dactyls

and spondees would scarcely continue. Other feet would automatically be formed. And, all in all, we would arrive at the Aurobindonian vision. Partly because of an incomplete and arbitrary scheme and partly because the afflatus was not as intense as Sri Aurobindo's, Cotterill's counterpart¹³ to the opening of the *Odyssey* we have culled from Sri Aurobindo, though a good composition on the whole by unconsciously approximating in its form to some of the technical insights of Sri Aurobindo, misses yet the genuine Homeric "how" of expression, except for line 4:

Sing, O Muse, of the man so weary and wise, who in far lands
 Wandered whenas he had wasted the sacred town of the Trojans.
 Many a people he saw and beheld their cities and customs,
 Many a woe he endured in his heart as he tossed on the ocean,
 Striving to win him his life and to bring home safely his comrades.
 Ah but he rescued them not, those comrades, much as he wished it.
 Ruined by their own act of infatuate madness they perished,
 Fools that they were — who the cows of the sun-god, lord Hyperion,
 Slaughtered and ate; and he took from the men their day of returning.
 Sing — whence-ever the lay — sing, Zeus-born goddess for us too!

It would seem that today the most promising voice is of an American disciple of Sri Aurobindo: Jesse Roarke. He has a translation of the entire *Iliad* waiting for an imaginative publisher. Some passages have seen the light in the pages of *Mother India*.¹⁴ Quite a few of their quantitative units may take some time to go home to the ear accustomed to Sri Aurobindo's handling of the form; but that would be due mostly to Roarke's more frequent use of the trochee (commonly substituting the Greek spondee) as compared to the predominance of the dactyl or other trisyllabic feet in Sri Aurobindo. It is a question whether this divergence is not somewhat of a hindrance at times to the largeness of utterance we expect from the Homeric movement; but the inspiration in the published passage is sufficiently strong to leap over the hitches of technique if any — and scholars still differ as to the technical importance of the spondee in Homer, though the greater occurrence of the dactyl on the whole is rarely in doubt. Anyway, future poets are free to follow their own instinct and ear in the wake of Sri Aurobindo's pioneering achievement on a grand scale, which sets the broad norm. We may quote one telling effect as a token from Roarke's rendering of the famous account of Priam's visit to Achilles to recover the body of Hector:

Then the voice of Priam spoke and was raised in entreaty:
 "O Achilles, like to the gods, remember your father,
 Whose years are even as mine, on the grievous tread of his old age;
 Haply now the dwellers about are treating him badly,

Harming him, now there is none for his shield from ruin and evil.
 Yet whenever he hears of you and knows you are living.
 Then he has joy in his breast and day by day he is hopeful,
 Waiting to see his own dear son returned from the Troad;
 Yet myself am bereft entirely, I who begot sons
 Best in Troy's broad land, and see not one who is left me . . .
 Have due thought of the gods, Achilles, and show me compassion,
 Your father bear in your heart; for I am more to be pitied
 Even than he, who am suffering what none has suffered on earth — to
 Lift my hand to the face of the man who has slaughtered my own son."

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

(Sri Aurobindo — *The Poet*, second edition 1999, pp. 279-90)

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SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of April 2017)

Chapter: LXI

The Destination Commanded

Those who live for Thee and in Thee may change their physical surroundings, their habits, climate, milieu, but everywhere they find the same atmosphere; they carry that atmosphere in themselves, in their thought constantly fixed on Thee. Everywhere they feel at home, for everywhere they are in Thy house.

The Mother (9 March, 1914)¹

The physical inconvenience with which Sri Aurobindo had to put up for about a month and half at Chandernagore was probably worse than what he had experienced during his incarceration at Alipore Presidency Jail, but nowhere in his conversations or letters can we find the slightest trace of any memory of discomfiture he experienced during that period of his self-exile. After all, the incarceration had been imposed upon him; passing time incognito at Chandernagore was his own decision. His Yoga had entered an intense phase while he was in the prison. “At Chandernagore he plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity.”²

When Charuchandra Roy most unexpectedly snubbed Sri Aurobindo’s emissary Biren with a sage advice, Shrishchandra Ghose, one of Roy’s students, a revolutionary, was present there. He kept quiet before his teacher’s demonstration of superior wisdom, but resented it. An outsider, he resided at a relative’s house and studied at the Dupleix School. He hurried to his friend and confidant, Motilal Roy, and expressed his anxiety and unhappiness over Charuchandra Roy’s attitude. Motilal, deeply interested in both Yoga and nationalism, who used to subscribe to the *Bande Mataram* because of his eagerness to read Sri Aurobindo’s articles and who had seen Sri Aurobindo at the Hooghly conference, at once rushed to the riverbank known as Ranighat. Through dusk and mist he could identify the boat that had sailed down from Calcutta. He found a pensive young man seated on it. Approaching him cautiously, he asked if the boat indeed had Sri Aurobindo inside it. The young man cast a penetrating look on the stranger and nodded and led him into the thatch. There lay Sri Aurobindo, obviously awake. Motilal introduced himself and proposed to put him up in his house. Upon Sri Aurobindo accepting the offer, he directed the boat to anchor at what was then a cremation ground, a bit away from

the Ghat, in order to avoid the notice of the early bathers in the Ganga.

Assured that Sri Aurobindo was in safe hands and also because their presence would not be conducive to his living unnoticed, Biren and Suresh took leave of him and embarked on their return voyage. Once the day broke they remembered that they had not had a morsel of food since their lunch on the previous day. They broke their journey at Uttarpara and appeasing their hunger at a shop on the riverbank, reached Calcutta by evening.

Motilal led Sri Aurobindo to his house along a desolate path. The part of the building he and his wife occupied was usually unfrequented by other members of the joint family. After the unusual and undreamt of guest had rested for a while in his drawing room, the host led him upstairs — into a dark room filthy and dusty, a crowded colony of cockroaches, spiders and specimens of other local flies and insects. As noiselessly as possible, Roy swept dust from a small part of the floor and placed a chair there. Sri Aurobindo quietly sat down.

Roy returned a little later with the breakfast that was meant for himself. Sri Aurobindo kept sitting as still as imaginable, his gaze poised upward. Writes Roy:

That was an otherworldly joyful sight! Sri Aurobindo had arrived at my house engrossed within. He obviously lay in the arms of the Divine. When he spoke it seemed someone else persuaded him to utter those words. Even a movement of his hand appeared to be manoeuvred by someone else. I placed the plate before him . . . he ate but a little, most mechanically.³

At noon when all was quiet Roy brought Sri Aurobindo to a closed courtyard and poured on him two full buckets of ice-cool water from the well. Sri Aurobindo showed no sign of discomfort. Roy could not offer him home-made lunch lest his presence be betrayed; he was given some “impure-ghee-baked” items bought from a shop — which he swallowed with perfect equanimity.

Sri Aurobindo was led to the house of an intimate friend of Roy’s at night. But when Roy met him the next day in the evening, he desired to leave that shelter. Roy brought him back to his house at night and put him up in a furniture-filled small ground-floor cabin unused for long, a narrow bed made for him in a corner.

Sri Aurobindo entered the room taking very soft steps. Sitting down on the bed, he told me, “You may retire; I’ll be comfortable here.” I understood that he loved solitude. Last night he had to share his room with someone else and that was detrimental to his sadhana. I hung a small-size mosquito-net and enclosed the bed with tables and chairs and then left for my room.⁴

Roy had neglected to keep even a glass of water beside his guest’s bed. Early in the morning he peeped in. Sri Aurobindo appeared to be soundly asleep.

However, his treasure could not remain hidden for long and that brought him great relief. His wife, in the course of her morning chores, suddenly stepped into the otherwise ignored lumber-room and was petrified at the sight of a pair of eyes focused on her. Confronting her husband, she learnt the mystery of the matter and from that moment devotedly served the guest for the rest of his sojourn in their house which was no more than four or five days. At Shrishchandra's suggestion, another young man, Narendranath Bandopadhyay too secretly supplied food for the guest a few times during that short period.

The one who seems to have been most concerned about Sri Aurobindo's safe hiding was Shrishchandra Ghose. He had enrolled the strictly confidential collaboration of a few other revolutionaries and sympathisers, eminently Narendranath Bandopadhyay and Sudarshan Chattopadhyay.

It was not advisable to keep Sri Aurobindo at one address beyond a limited period — they thought. They instructed Roy to leave their guest at a particular spot at the southern end of the town when all was quiet at night. The Roys had a stable. Carefully avoiding the sleeping syce, Motilal unfastened a pair of horses and harnessed them to the carriage and himself risked driving the guest to the appointed spot where the guest's would-be escorts were waiting. He did not ask nor was he told about the guest's next camp.

His new shelter was the residence of Narendranath Bandopadhyay. Again, not for long. He was shifted to a site locally known as Kar's Garden. The secrecy maintained for this transition was no less. As narrated by Narendranath:

Shrishchandra had forbidden us to enter the Garden through the entrance on the public road. A part of the wall at the back of the Garden had collapsed and that could be approached through a narrow lane. While entering the Garden in darkness we stumbled on each other. Aurobindo Babu softly laughed and commented that the British would drive them into unnatural death!⁵

But as the place was found to be not quite safe, Sri Aurobindo was taken to a house — probably under temporary occupation by Sudarshan Chattopadhyay, at the northern part of the town, close to Jagannath Bati. Sudarshan would lock up the house at 9 a.m. in the morning and go to his office, only to open his house in the evening, leaving the guest a prisoner for the entire day, but with some victuals and water left in the room.⁶ Probably, prior to that, he lived in a room with a thatched roof for a while. Shrishchandra, who alone could have left a chronology of his transient dwellings, has not done so. All the while, Sri Aurobindo, evidently, was hardly mindful of his changing situations.

Sri Aurobindo's sadhana at Chandernagore went on with intensity. He saw many visions on the subtle planes. He used to see figures of three Goddesses

at the time of meditation. They were seen going away at the end. It was later when he went to Pondicherry that he knew them to be Ila, Mahi (Bharati) and Saraswati, the Vedic Goddesses.⁷

Motilal and others, to the best of their aspirations, abilities and opportunities available, absorbed the light radiated by their providential guest by his presence and by his response to their questions. Outwardly, it was Motilal who benefited most. As D. S. Mahalanobis writes:

Sri Aurobindo's 39 days' stop-over at Chandernagore in close touch with his humble devotee, Shri Roy, made the latter, in days to come, his trusted friend and instrument through whom for some years his politico-revolutionary activities guided from Pondicherry, seeped and fanned out to his followers in Bengal and made Shri Motilal famous almost overnight, while the prime mover remained veiled in far-off French territory unlocated and unbeknown except to a few, until the curtain was raised by the appearance of his cultural review, the "Arya", on the 15th August, 1914.⁸

Posterity feels grateful to Motilal for the spontaneous reverence with which he received Sri Aurobindo and the subsequent service he rendered him till 1920.⁹

According to his own statement in one place of his reminiscences, Motilal did not meet Sri Aurobindo almost for a month; though elsewhere he contradicts himself. Be it as it may, at midnight on the 30th of March 1910 Motilal heard a knock on his door. There stood Shrishchandra. Sri Aurobindo was leaving Chandernagore. He wished to see Motilal. It was a moonlit night. Sri Aurobindo stood on the Ghat, informs Motilal, waiting to take leave of his first host. Motilal gave him a tearful farewell. The boat left in the early hours of the 31st. Sri Aurobindo was accompanied by Shrishchandra and Sudarshan.

A command had come from the "voice well-known" once again. Recollected Sri Aurobindo in the course of a conversation with his attendant-disciples on 18 December 1938:

Sri Aurobindo: I was wondering what to do next. Then I heard the Adesh, "Go to Pondicherry."

Dr. Manilal: Why to Pondicherry?

Sri Aurobindo: I could not question. It was Sri Krishna's Adesh. I had to obey. Later I found it was for the Ashram, for the Yogic work.¹⁰

About a month later, on the 21 January 1939, to a question by Satyendra, "Cannot one be mistaken in obeying these voices?" Sri Aurobindo answered:

It was impossible to make a mistake or to think of disobeying that voice which came to me. There are some voices about which there is no possibility of any doubt or mistake.¹¹

Only two persons in Calcutta had been informed about Sri Aurobindo's plan to proceed to Pondicherry: his cousin Sukumar Mitra (the son of Krishna Kumar Mitra) and Suresh Chakravorty *alias* Moni. The house of Krishna Kumar, Sri Aurobindo's maternal uncle as well as a courageous leader and champion of social causes, at 6 College Square (lately declared a Heritage Building) had been Sri Aurobindo's last residence in British India and his clothes and books were all there. Sukumar was asked to book two berths in a passenger ship to Pondicherry at the earliest available opportunity and to arrange to deposit Sri Aurobindo's luggage in the cabin reserved for the passengers. The young Suresh, aged 18, was instructed to proceed to Pondicherry immediately with a letter from Sri Aurobindo to a nationalist leader there.

It is obvious that there was more than one round of correspondence on the arrangements, but they must have been carried with utmost secrecy and through most faithful friends or followers. A steamship 'SS Dupleix' controlled by the well-known travel agents, Messageries Maritimes, was to start on the 1st of April for France, with stopovers at Pondicherry and Colombo. Sukumar entrusted a young revolutionary, Nagendrakumar Guharoy (later a prominent political leader and author of several works including *Mahayogi Aurobindo* in Bengali, with the task of buying two tickets for passengers named Jyotindranath Mitra and Bankim Chandra Bhowmik (according to Suresh Chakravarti, 'Bankimchandra Basak'), bound for Colombo. That destination was to leave no scope for any suspicion.

A second-class double cabin was booked. Sri Aurobindo's luggage, consisting of two trunks, had already been despatched from the house of the Mitras to Nagendrakumar's lodge. In the afternoon of the 31st of March, they were carried by him to the cabin meant for the two passengers.

Sri Aurobindo's journey from Chandernagore to the small harbour off Calcutta known as Chandpal Ghat was to be executed in three phases: till Agarpara by one boat, from there to Uttarpara escorted by Amarendranath Chatterjee by another and thence to the harbour by yet another guided by Nagendranath. However, the third boat could not be located at the Ghat at Uttarpara and Amarendra directed his boat to proceed to Calcutta. But none was waiting for them there either. Time was running out. They left the boat and drove to College Square by a carriage. But Sukumar was not at home. Meanwhile Nagendrakumar, missing Sri Aurobindo at Uttarpara, had reached the Chandpal Ghat and then rushed to inform Sukumar that Sri Aurobindo had failed to arrive. Entry into the ship would strictly be closed at 11 p.m.

Sukumar asked Nagendrakumar to remove Sri Aurobindo's luggage from his cabin. Nagendrakumar did so and came back to College Square. But meanwhile

Sukumar learnt about Sri Aurobindo's brief visit there and his departure for the Ghat. Nagendrakumar returned to the wharf and was united with the missing party at last.

Yet the moment had not arrived for them to heave a sigh of relief; for the British medical officer without whose certificate no passenger could be admitted had already called it a day and retired for home!

A coolie accomplished in the art of dealing with the problems of passengers assured them that he knew the doctor's residence. He boarded their carriage and guided it to the proper place. He not only sent a hint to the doctor about the latter's prospect of earning a little extra for his over-time function, but tried to make the visitors feel comfortable. He observed that Sri Aurobindo alone kept quiet and aloof while the others were quite lively. With uncontrollable pity for Sri Aurobindo he went closer to him and said in a tone of exhortation, "Babuji, why are you nervous? The doctor is a very good man. Have no fear!" He even treated Sri Aurobindo to a handshake.

Sri Aurobindo smiled.

The passengers were summoned to the doctor's presence. He summarily checked the two — "Jyotindranath Mitra" and "Bankim Chandra Basak" (or Bhowmik) — and expressed his pleasant surprise at the chaste English spoken by "Mr. Mitra". Sri Aurobindo had to say that he had been in England for some time.

The news of the missing "dangerous man" was widely in the air and no educated person of the ruling tribe could have remained unaware of the sensation. It was sheer luck that the doctor simply appreciated his client's English instead of suspecting any mystery behind it, for he would have rarely — probably never — come across a Colombo-bound native Indian speaking the King's English that perfectly. As the coolie had assured Sri Aurobindo, he was a good man, it was not unlikely that some tender little tonic at the end of the day had boosted up that goodness in him resulting in a generous outlook.

But 'luck' had intervened again and again right from Sri Aurobindo leaving the *Karmayogin* office one night some six weeks ago. The office building was continuously under C.I.D. surveillance. But just when he quietly went out of it following Ramachandra and Suresh and Biren following him, the process of continuity seems to have had an interval! When it became clear that Sri Aurobindo was missing from their ken, the officials believed that he was underground somewhere in the city itself; the possibility of his having slipped into the neighbouring foreign territory never struck them. It would have been far more easy for them to locate their prey in that small town than in Calcutta. From Chandernagore Sri Aurobindo was certainly communicating with Sukumar Mitra and some others. Sukumar sent some of his clothes to his hiding. The C.I.D. could not feel a whiff of such movements. It was luck again that disrupted the original arrangements for reaching the Ghat. Had they run smooth, Sri Aurobindo would have been obliged

to go through the regular medical examination and checked in along with others in the presence of several people including surveillance officials.

Sri Aurobindo left the doctor's residence that was on the Theatre Road. Thus, the last spot he visited in British India was on the very road on which stood the mansion of Barrister-at-Law Manmohan Ghose — the house in which he was born.

It was almost 11 p.m. when the passengers as well as Nagendrakumar and Amarendranath entered the reserved cabin in the steamship. While Bijoy began preparing the bed for Sri Aurobindo, Amar handed over to him some money Rajendra Mukherjee, the landlord of Uttarpa, had offered for him.

Nagendrakumar records that unforgettable moment in his life thus:

I prostrated myself before Sri Aurobindo and placed my forehead on his feet. I felt overwhelmed at touching that Divine body. I left the shore after bidding goodbye to the god in the floating ship on the river Ganga with the same kind of melancholy that takes possession of us when we return home after submerging the idol (of the Mother Durga) on the Vijaya Dashami day.¹²

As the two young men went down the gangway, entry into the ship was closed. It began its voyage early in the morning on the 1st of April 1910.

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

Notes and References

1. The Mother: *Prayers and Meditations*; Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
2. Sri Aurobindo: *On Himself*; SABCL, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
3. Motilal Roy: *Jeevan Sanginee* (Bengali); Prabartak Publishers, Kolkata.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Narendranath Bandopadhyay: *Rakta Biplaber Ek Adhyay*; quoted by Trij Roy in *Sri Aurobindo O Chandannagar* (Bengali); Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Hooghly, Chinchura.
6. Motilal Roy, in *Light to Superlight*; by Arun Chandra Dutt, Prabartak Publishers, Kolkata.
7. A. B. Purani: *Life of Sri Aurobindo*; Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
8. D. S. Mahalanobis: Foreword for *Light to Superlight*; compiled by Arun Chandra Dutt; Prabartak Publishers, Kolkata.
9. It ought to be made clear that while Motilal Roy (1883 – 1956) played a providential role in facilitating Sri Aurobindo's stay in Chandernagore and the contact gave a radical turn to his life, his two works of reminiscences portray the Master in a sentimental fashion that does not go with the personality of Sri Aurobindo. Suresh Chandra Chakravorty exposed his exaggerations in his memoirs.

10. Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*; Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Sources for the account of this journey from Chandernagore to the ship SS Duplex are Nagendrakumar Guharoy's "Debata Biday" (Bengali) in *Galpa Bharati*, Kolkata, A. B. Purani's *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, Shrijayanta Krishna Chandra's *Sri Aurobinder Chandannagare Ajnatbas* (Bengali) and Trij Roy's *Sri Aurobindo O Chandannagar* (Bengali) among others.

A free world-union must in its very nature be a complex unity based on a diversity and that diversity must be based on free self-determination. A mechanical unitarian system would regard in its idea the geographical groupings of men as so many conveniences for provincial division, for the convenience of administration, much in the same spirit as the French Revolution reconstituted France with an entire disregard of old natural and historic divisions. It would regard mankind as one single nation and it would try to efface the old separative national spirit altogether; it would arrange its system probably by continents and subdivide the continents by convenient geographical demarcations. In this other quite opposite idea, the geographical, the physical principle of union would be subordinated to a psychological principle; for not a mechanical division, but a living diversity would be its object. If this object is to be secured, the peoples of humanity must be allowed to group themselves according to their free-will and their natural affinities; no constraint or force could be allowed to compel an unwilling nation or distinct grouping of peoples to enter into another system or join itself or remain joined to it for the convenience, aggrandisement or political necessity of another people or even for the general convenience, in disregard of its own wishes.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 540)

FOUR SONGS

MAHALAKSHMI

In lotus-groves Thy spirit roves: where shall I find a seat for Thee?
To Thy feet's tread — feet dawn-rose red — opening, my heart Thy throne shall be.
All things unlovely hurt Thy soul:
I would become a stainless whole:
O World's delight! All-beauty's might! unmoving house Thy grace in me.
An arid heart Thou canst not bear:
It is Thy will love's bonds to wear:
Then by Thy sweetness' magic completeness make me Thy love's eternal sea.

(Translated by Sri Aurobindo from the Bengali original)

Sri Aurobindo's note in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy:

Anilbaran's song is best rendered by an Elizabethan simplicity and intensity with as little artifice of metre and diction as possible. I have tried to do it in that way.

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 558, 624)

MAHAKALI

Thine is the fiery will that mocks
Faint-hearted compromise!
Ruthless Thou shearest all that blocks
Our path to Paradise.

The thunders whirl at Thy command,
O flaming, beautiful Mother;
Thou smitest with one mighty hand,
And savest with the other.

Pervasive of Thy tameless ire
As an all-puissant love;
It leads us through the test of fire
To immortal gates above.

(Anilbaran, *Songs from the Soul*, p. 169)

THE HEART OF MY HEART

You are the heart of my heart, O Mother!
 You are the light of my eyes, O Sweet!
 Seeking you alone my final refuge
 Life is fulfilled at your radiant feet.
 When I am afraid with the fear of the tempest
 I bury my face in your lap for a while.
 The mind's imperfections, the myriad darknesses
 Are washed into light in the stream of your smile.

This difficult path I am treading, O Mother!
 Is slippery, tangled with thorns, and unsafe.
 At every turn under chains of my forging
 Which ring at each footfall, I tremble and chafe.
 When I cry to you, "O my Mother! my Mother!"
 Deep into my breast what a power you pour
 Removing all obstacles, in the black darkness
 You kindle a splendour unkindled before.

The seers and the sages through ages and ages
 Have striven to fathom your Beauty so long!
 A million poets have wrought their salvation
 By singing your infinite Wonder in song.
 But alas! I have neither the power of the poet,
 Nor knowledge of sages nor training of seers!
 Yet, all that I know is to empty my bosom
 And love you, O Love, in a rapture of tears.

(Translated by Harindranath Chattopadhyaya from the Bengali original)

(Anilbaran, Songs from the Soul, pp. 177-78)

MOTHER VICTORIOUS

Upon this mortal earth Thou buildest a garden of Paradise,
O Mother of dreams, Mother victorious!

Overwhelmed with wonder the heart lies prostrate at Thy feet,
O Mother victorious!

Saints and great souls sing to Thee in adoration,
O Mother omnipotent, Mother victorious!

Blind darknesses fall faint and numb before the arrows of Thy Light,
O Mother victorious!

Saviour from all evil, deliverer from pain is Thy Great name,
O Mother victorious!

A home of safety is the refuge at Thy feet,
O Mother of Bliss, Mother victorious!

The fear of death and age vanishes today
O all-conquering Mother, Mother victorious!

The seas of sorrow disappear at the touch of Thy Grace,
O Mother of Peace, Mother victorious!

The sheen of gold pales before Thy hue that enthralls my soul,
O Mother of Light, Mother victorious!

In the heart of the devotee Thou art the delight that is heaven's nectar,
O Mother of Love, Mother victorious!

(Translated by Nolini Kanta Gupta from the Bengali original)

(Anilbaran, Songs from the Soul, pp. 179-80)

ANILBARAN ROY

A NOTE ON THE CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD: THE THEORY OF MAYA

The *vācārambhaṇa* text occurs in the Chandogya Upanishad. It is a famous text often quoted by Advaitins in support of their theory of Maya (illusion). It is as follows: *vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam, mṛttiketyeva satyam*. It means: the clay alone is real, while the modification of clay is a name depending on speech i.e. while the modification is of the nature of unreality (*vikārabhūtonāmadheyoanṛtāmakah*).¹ By extending this teaching to Brahman who modifies himself as the world it is said that while Brahman is real, the world is unreal (*anṛta*). Hence Advaitins argue that the Chandogya Upanishad supports their theory of Maya.

A Popular Presentation

In the history of Indian metaphysics two attempts were made to oppose the theory of Maya and offer alternate readings of the text. As both of them are unsatisfactory, the theory of Maya continues to be a popular presentation of the Advaitins. Even eminent scholars believe that the theory is one of the fundamental teachings of the Upanishads. But this is contrary to their general teaching. The Upanishads should be understood without the help of the Agamashastra of Gaudapada as well as of the commentaries written by Shankara in support of Gaudapada. An independent study of the Chandogya Upanishad will be able to clearly tell us whether or not the theory of Maya is favoured by the *vācārambhaṇa* text.

Two Versions of the Text

There are two versions of the *vācārambhaṇa* text. The first version is given through three examples of which clay is one, and the second version is related to the science of Being (*sadvidyā*) which speaks of the three Elements (Fire, Water and Earth) as the material cause of the world. The two versions are given below:

- (i) The clay called by the name clay is alone real (*mṛttiketyeva satyam*), for the illusory clay (*vikārah*) begun by the word clay (*vācārambhaṇam*) is but the name clay (*nāmadheyam*).
- (ii) The three Elements called by the names Fire, Water and Earth are alone real (*trīṇirūpāṇītyeva satyam*), for the illusory Elements (*vikārah*) begun by the words Fire, Water and Earth (*vācārambhaṇam*) are but the names Fire, Water and Earth (*nāmadheyam*).

From the above readings it is clear that the *vācārambhaṇa* text does not support the theory of Maya of Advaitins. It is proved beyond doubt that this theory is not an inevitable teaching of the text. What the text actually teaches is this: We must carefully distinguish between word and reality otherwise we might be dealing with the delusion created by the word and not know the reality. This is the significance of the teaching of the Mundaka Upanishad which says that the imperishable Atman is attained not through delusion created by the word Atman (*na ayam ātmā labyaḥ pramādāt*).²

Another Reading of the Text

There is another reading of the above text. It concerns clay as an example. It reads thus: the modification of clay (*vikāraḥ*) is parallel to the name produced from the language (*nāmadheyam vācārambhaṇam*). From this parallelism two things are known. First, like the name which is an expression of the language, the modifications of clay are expressions of the clay. Second, like the language which is the means of knowing all names, the clay is the right means (*mṛttiketyeva satyam*) of knowing all modifications of clay. This is the second proof that the text can be understood otherwise without connecting it with the theory of Maya and dismissing *vikāraḥ* as an unreal modification.

The Word Name

Advaitins equate *nāmadheyam* (name) with *anṛtātmakam* (unreality). Is it really possible to do so? The product of clay (*vikāraḥ*) is said to be parallel to the name (*nāmadheyam*). It follows from this that the product of clay is like the name which is born of the word (*vācārambhaṇam*) and which is but the word. In other words, the product of clay is born of the clay and it is but the clay. As the clay and the products of clay are one in essence, the clay becomes the right means (*satyam*) of knowing all the products of clay. In this reading the word *name* is not associated with the sense of unreality in any manner. It is rather associated with its parallel *vikāraḥ* which is but the clay. This goes against the reading of the Advaitins.

There is a dialogue between Narada and Sanatkumara in the Chandogya Upanishad (7-1) and it begins with a long list of the subjects Narada has studied. On listening to Narada's extensive study, Sanatkumara says that all the subjects mastered by him are a mere name (*nāmaiva*). In the dialogue the word *name* is used everywhere to signify the subjects that fall under various categories. In other words, it is a conventional means of classification of subjects of study. The word is nowhere used to mean that the subjects mentioned by Narada are about forms without content or unreal things. By *nāmaiva* is meant that Narada is concerned merely with the subjects of study.

From the above discussions it is abundantly clear that it is wrong to use *nāma-*

dheyam in the sense of unreality (*anṛtātmakam*). This leads to two conclusions — (i) the *vācārambhaṇa* text is not in favour of the theory of Maya; (ii) the text is proved to be based on a wrong reading of *nāmadheyam*. The usage of the word *name* is to be determined in the light of both the teaching of Uddalaka and the relevant words of Sanatkumara.

N. JAYASHANMUGAM

Notes

1. Shankara, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, 2-1-3
2. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3-2-4

References

1. Jayashanmugam, N., *The Upaniṣads: A Study of the Original Texts* (2016); Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, New Delhi.
2. Srinivasa Chari, S. M., *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads* (2002); Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi.

The Upanishads abound with passages which are at once poetry and spiritual philosophy, of an absolute clarity and beauty, but no translation empty of the suggestions and the grave and subtle and luminous sense echoes of the original words and rhythms can give any idea of their power and perfection. There are others in which the subtlest psychological and philosophical truths are expressed with an entire sufficiency without falling short of a perfect beauty of poetical expression and always so as to live to the mind and soul and not merely be presented to the understanding intelligence.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 340)

AN EXPERIENCE

[Satprem tells the Mother:] *They've found in Pavitra's things the record of an experience he had three years ago, just when his cancer was beginning. Would you be interested to know the text of that experience? . . .*

Is it interesting? . . . As for me, I have nothing to say. I have nothing to say, things are going on . . . It's difficult.

Yes.

But anyway . . .

Pavitra has remained here, not at all mingled; now and then, wholly conscious, otherwise very tranquil. It's good — not a hindrance, you understand . . . Now and then, he manifests something, which shows he remains conscious. That's all.

As for me, I am continuing . . . it's not easy. That's all. So I can listen to this.

*

[Satprem then reads out to the Mother Pavitra's experience of the night of February 5, 1966]

It is a night of fully conscious spiritual experience, a night of torture and glory.

I walked through large rooms in which beings without communication with outside were living. And other rooms where wretched beings were dragging out a wretched life. They took notice of my presence, which seemed to bring them a ray of light from outside. A few reacted well, with a smile; others fled. A few knocked against me. Then I went into other rooms. The same goal always seemed to justify my presence. For, as I went by, a few showed a sign of hope. But at the same time obstacles, sufferings, tortures of all kinds fell on me. They were not deliberately inflicted tortures, but sorts of reactions of ignorance and suffering.

This work progressively became more and more difficult for me. I moved about with difficulty, walked more and more slowly, as though overburdened, until it finally became difficult for me to find my way . . . to escape.

These experiences seemed to last for a long time. When they ended, I found myself in my physical body, surprised that it bore no marks of all that I had just undergone.

But I slowly began to understand the meaning of all that had taken place. An immense gratitude rose from my heart towards the Supreme, as did an entire self-

giving so that His Will may be accomplished everywhere.

I perceived the meaning of the great promise:

“I shall deliver you from all evil, fear not.”

(Bhagavad Gita, 18.4.66)

That promise of victory from the Divine embodied on the earth carried me away with joy.

I repeat that I was fully conscious for as long as those experiences lasted.

That is all I have to say.

(From a conversation with the Mother on May 28, 1969)

The supramental change is the ultimate stage of siddhi and it is not likely to come so soon; but there are many levels between the normal mind and the supermind and it is easy to mistake an ascent into one of them or a descent of their consciousness or influence for a supramental change.

It is quite impossible to ascend to the real Ananda plane (except in a profound trance), until after the supramental consciousness has been entered, realised and possessed; but it is quite possible and normal to feel some form of Ananda consciousness on any level. This consciousness wherever it is felt is a derivation from the Ananda plane, but it is very much diminished in power and modified to suit the lesser power of receptivity of the inferior levels.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga — I, CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 299)

MY TIME WITH CHAMPAKLAL

When I arrived at the Ashram in 1971, Champaklal was a rarely-seen, almost legendary figure. He had come to Pondicherry from Gujarat as a young man, worked closely with the Mother from the beginning, attended Sri Aurobindo personally for twenty-five years and then the Mother for nearly as long. I first saw him on December 12th when I went to meet the Mother in her room. Before turning to her I glanced at him and he welcomed me with a big smile. Then after the Mother's passing in 1973, I often saw him on Saturday evenings at the Playground. Five minutes before the weekly film began, he would burst through the gate, barrel-chest boldly stuck out, and stride to his place on the sandy ground. I got to know him personally in 1987, when he called me to do some work for him.

One day late in May 1987, Roshan Dumasia, a Bombay University Professor who assisted Champaklal during her vacations, came to my desk at the Archives and said that Champaklal wished to see me. He needed someone to transcribe some manuscripts of Sri Aurobindo, mainly letters and messages. After taking permission from my department head, Jayantilal, I agreed to help. Over the next two years I spent an hour or more with Champaklal on about a dozen occasions. At first I called him 'Champaklalji', but soon it became 'Dadaji', as he was called by those close to him.

The 1987 Meetings

My first work was to type out Champaklal's own correspondence with Sri Aurobindo. The full correspondence was being prepared by Roshan for a revised edition of the book *Champaklal Speaks*. On June 3rd I went to his room with a typed copy of the manuscripts he had given for transcription. Champaklal looked at my work slowly and carefully. Now and then he expressed his appreciation with a smile, a gleam in his eyes, a lively hand movement. Something of a mime artist, he had a mobile face and a gift for conveying his thoughts and emotions through gestures. I was happy that he took so much time to see my work. Later I found that he took time for almost everything he did.

During the final years of his life Champaklal observed a vow of silence (*mauna vrat*), so, any verbal communication between us had to be done through writing. After checking my work he wrote on a slip of paper, "I admire you", and handed it to me. I read the words and blushed with embarrassment. Then he took the slip again and added, "You work with love and joy." Flushed with elation I blurted out, "I admire you too!" and explained, "To me you stand for service, freedom and wideness of mind. You do what you think is right, regardless of what other people say." I had

in mind his recent travels in India and abroad, for which he was sometimes criticised in the Ashram; the prevailing view was that he should have stayed at home. In reply to what I told him, Champaklal wrote, "Because of Her abundant Grace." As I came to learn, it was typical of him to attribute any merit in himself to the Mother.

Sharing a Laugh

On June 12th I went to his room with a second batch of manuscripts and my transcription of them. While Champaklal looked over my work, I peeked around the room. Pictures everywhere — on all four walls, from floor to ceiling, big black-and-white photographs and a few brightly-coloured paintings. Mother and Sri Aurobindo all around. A soft yellow-gold carpet covered the floor. Seated on it comfortably, clad only in a white loincloth, with his golden-brown skin showing everywhere, Champaklal looked like a happy child. After checking my transcript he wrote, "Mother used to like good work so much. Now even more — must be!" I laughed, pleased with the idea that Mother now appreciates our work more than ever. He also laughed and it was good to hear his chuckles. Then he wrote, "Champaklal respects and admires very much such a person." Touched by his compliment I said, "Your kind words give me faith in myself." In response he wrote, "The *qwaliti (sic)* is Hers."

The Case of the Missing Photo

The next day Roshan brought a third batch of manuscripts to me for transcription. She also asked me to speak to Jayantilal on a delicate matter. Champaklal had given him, she said, a large hand-coloured photograph of the Mother, but it had not been returned and Champaklal wanted it back. Later in the day I asked Jayantilal about this photo. He said that Champaklal had given him a copy of the photo, not the large original, and Jayantilal had been careful to return the copy, knowing that Champaklal was particular about such things.

A few days later I went to see Champaklal for work and broached the subject of the missing photo. "Jayantilal says he doesn't have the photo," I said. "He told me that you gave him a smaller copy of it and he returned it." Champaklal's face suddenly darkened and he grimaced; he clearly did not buy this story! The air became heavy with tension as he struggled to contain the rising anger in him. Apparently he thought that Jayantilal still had the photo or had misplaced it and was making an excuse. There was a long, ominous silence. I could hardly breathe. At last the tension lessened, Champaklal's face relaxed and he gave a weary smile. Picking up a slip of paper, he penned three words and handed the slip to me with a gesture of resignation. "Does not matter," it said. Maybe not, I thought, but something is not right.

There was another long and heavy silence. Then Champaklal's whole countenance softened and his face underwent a visible metamorphosis. A growing warmth and joy spread across it, the gravity in the air abated, and I could breathe freely again. He reached for a slip of paper and slowly wrote, "So many things Champaklal has lost — now one more." Handing me the slip, he smiled with a look of compassion tinged with sorrow. This look of his was most touching. It seemed to me that he probably thought the missing photo might still be somewhere with Jayantilal, but he was not pressing for it. His unspoken message was: "So many things I have lost in my life. Who am I to get angry and point the finger of blame at someone else?" I felt great sympathy and respect for him. He had passed the test — he had faced the dark cloud of anger in himself and dissolved it. In place of the cloud a radiant glow of tenderness shone on his face; his heart was again at peace. How honest one must be to remain bright and happy.

After a week Champaklal sent a letter of apology to Jayantilal for any anxiety he might have caused. He had not yet found the missing photo, he wrote, but he thought that it must be somewhere with him or perhaps he had given it to someone else. The latter surmise turned out to be true: years later I found the original hand-coloured photograph in the room of my downstairs neighbour!

Only One Sadhana

Towards the end of June I returned the third batch of manuscripts to Champaklal. There was very little work that day, so I spoke to him about something that was bothering me. "Dadaji," I said, "I do japa to control my mind, but I don't have a mantra. I have tried so many mantras, but I can't settle on one. Could you suggest a mantra for me?" He slowly inscribed on a chit: "What I think. Any mantra you say with love and joy is good. But it is not necessary. Only if it comes spontaneously." As I read his reply, Champaklal watched my face and he could tell that I was not satisfied; in fact I was still hoping that he would give me a mantra. He smiled and wrote, "I myself do not have a mantra." That did satisfy me — it meant we were both in the same boat! Again he took up his pen and wrote: "To me Mother gave only one sadhana." Then he pulled out a birthday card that contained a message she had written to him in the early 1930s:

Be simple,
Be happy,
Remain quiet,
Do your work as well as you can.
Keep yourself open always towards me.
This is all that is asked from you.

Champaklal wrote, “I asked her: ‘You say, “This is all that is asked from you.” All? Only this?’ Mother said, ‘Only this.’ I said, ‘Mother, just give me one.’” — that is, just one of the five things she had listed. He ended his note, “By her Grace she has given them all to me. This is my condition. I want nothing.”

At the end of our session he handed me a packet of incense and a Divine Love flower.

The 1988 Meetings

At the end of the summer of 1987 Roshan left the Ashram to resume her teaching duties in Bombay. When she came back in April 1988, we took up work with Champaklal again. I went to his room on the 28th with a framed photograph he had given me the year before, a little-known photo of the Mother taken on her birthday in 1973. She is wearing a dark red sari embroidered in gold and on her head is a large gold triangular crown with her symbol on it. Her eyes are closed and she is indrawn. When I first saw the photo, I was deeply attracted to it, so he gave it to me! But over the months I had not looked at it much. “I want to return this photo to you,” I said. “I have not been feeling much for it lately.”

Happy to see the photo again, he looked intently at it for about two minutes. As he gazed, his face took on an uncanny resemblance to the face of the Mother in the photo; the extent of his identification was remarkable. Then he began a forty-minute ‘discussion’ of the photograph, with him writing and me commenting every now and then.

“Why don’t people like this photo?” he wrote. I didn’t know what to say. Then he asked me to read out aloud something he had written about the photo, a two-page typescript. The gist of it was that although the photograph is not superficially pleasing, it expresses a deep inner state, and if one looks at it for a few minutes one will be drawn deep inside — this was his own experience. The photograph is merely a symbol of the Mother, just as the stone image of Kali worshipped by Ramakrishnadev at Dakshineswar is a symbol of Mother Kali. By dwelling on the symbol one can enter into the consciousness behind it. At this point Champaklal showed me a coloured print of Jagannath of Puri, with Balaram and Subhadra on either side of him. “Chaitanyadev had darshan of Krishna by seeing this image,” he wrote. Then he asked me a whole series of questions about the Mother’s photo, sometimes supplying the answers himself.

“Why don’t people like it?” he wrote.

“Because Mother is not smiling and she looks so serious,” I said.

“But she is not smiling in other photos,” he countered.

“Her eyes are closed,” I said, “so people don’t know what she is thinking. It makes them afraid.”

Champaklal’s eyes lit up with a gleam. “FEAR,” he wrote. “They are afraid to

go within.”

Still absorbed in the subject, he penned, “Is the gold crown not beautiful? Mother liked it very much.” Pointing to the photo, he wrote, “Mother liked it very much. She looked at it happily for a long time in my presence.” And then, “She signed a copy of it for someone and gave her blessings. She never signed if she did not like a photo.” About the copy I had returned, he wrote, “It wanted to come back to me.”

After this unusual session, Champaklal sent me off with a packet of incense and a Divine Love flower.

Preservation of Manuscripts

A week later, on May 5th, I went to see Champaklal at 10.30 in the morning. We had a long discussion on the preservation of manuscripts. I told him that it was not safe for him to keep his manuscripts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother enclosed in plastic sheets, because the plastic would decompose in time and contaminate the manuscripts with acid, turning them yellow and shortening their lifespan. After questioning me closely, even about the effect of the acids contained in the manuscripts themselves, he agreed to remove the plastic sheets. Later I supplied him with thin, non-acidic paper folders for the work.

Dwelling in the Zone

Champaklal was conscientious in his care for material things, deliberate and thorough. Perhaps because he was solidly grounded, I always felt at ease and secure with him. It took a long time to do things, but I didn’t feel we were wasting time. I sensed that even while he did things, he dwelt inwardly in a contented spiritual zone. While his outer nature did the work, his inner being remained concentrated within: he was one-fourth outside and three-fourths inside. In his presence I basked in an atmosphere of serenity, removed from the pressing concerns of life. He had learned, I think, the truth of the Mother’s comment, “As soon as one stops hurrying, one enters a truer vibration.”

Little Jokes

My third visit took place on May 12th. We didn’t work much, but it was a joy just to sit there in his presence. Then, towards the end, I got restless and started making gestures to get up and go. Champaklal either ignored them or smiled without giving me a nod to leave, so I sat on. Then someone came who said he needed to see Champaklal for two minutes and asked to be left alone with him. I went into the next room and waited. Ten minutes later the fellow came out and left. I returned to

Champaklal's room. "Why did you leave?" he wrote. "X asked to be alone with you," I said. He smiled mischievously and wiggled two fingers back and forth, as if to say, "Yes, but only for two minutes!" I thought this was very funny, so I laughed. He also laughed and his eyes sparkled. I think he was happy to have someone to enjoy his little jokes.

That day Champaklal started to get up to bring a flower for me from Sri Aurobindo's room, but feeling weak he sank back down again. I motioned for him to stay put — no need to send me off with a flower each time. So he just sat there like a child with a big smile on his face, and I left.

Willing Work, No Obligation

Five days later, on May 17th, I went to see him again. There was not much to do, but the time passed easily. We sank into an enjoyable meditative state. After a while Champaklal wrote that he would like to have new photocopies made of his *Bonne Fête* notebook in which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had for many years written birthday messages for him. He showed me the old photocopies, which were small and faded, with shadowy lines at the edges. "Very bad job," he wrote. I asked, "Do you want the new copies to be the same size as the originals?" "If you can," he wrote. "Of course we can," I said. "Yes, *you* can," he rejoined, "but can *he*?" 'He' was the person who had not shown much enthusiasm for doing such work in the past. We both laughed. Then he wrote, "Do it if he is willing, but not if he feels obliged." That was Champaklal's style: he freely asked people to do things for him, but he wanted them done willingly. At the end of the hour he sent me off with incense and a flower.

The Art of Living

My final meeting with Champaklal that year took place the next day, May 18th. That evening he was leaving Pondicherry for a two-month tour of Europe and the United States. I expected him to be very busy, maybe packing, and was prepared to leave early to spare his time. When I arrived at 10.30 he was working as usual with Roshan. I sat on the floor and waited fifteen minutes until they finished their work together. By then I had calmed down. Suddenly old Dikshitbhai, well into his nineties, appeared at the door to wish Champaklal *Bon voyage* for his journey abroad. When Dikshitbhai showed deferential respect to his younger *gurubhai*, Champaklal put his head down like an embarrassed little boy and said nothing. Dikshitbhai sat down on the carpet and we spent several minutes sitting in silence; then he got up to go. Champaklal came out of his ingathered condition, held Dikshitbhai's hand warmly and gave him some flowers.

I felt it was time for me to go too and started to get up. Champaklal smiled and

motioned to me with his eyes to remain seated. Quickly he sank down again into an indrawn state. Roshan and I also became indrawn. Five minutes, ten minutes, I kept going deeper and deeper. Then I understood! He was leaving for Europe that evening and had things to do, but no, he was not all tensed up and in a hurry; he was doing the only thing really worth doing, plunging inside, living in the Presence. Indeed, he seemed to have forgotten the time! The minutes passed slowly, but I was so tranquillised that I lost the impulse to go. A great wave of affection arose in me and flowed towards this kindly man who was teaching me by his own example the art of living: Remember the important thing, the inner presence. Don't be running around all the time. Learn to appreciate and enjoy the Grace.

At last, emerging from the little meditation he had induced in us, Champaklal got up, went into Sri Aurobindo's room and returned with two kinds of incense and a Divine Love flower. Handing them to me, he smiled sweetly. I stepped out the door as he watched me go.

My Mother Meets Champaklal

That was my last long meeting with Champaklal. In the years that followed, I saw him a number of times, but only briefly. Still, he remembered me and made me feel special. Once, towards the end, I brought my mother to see him. He was weak as a kitten, having suffered a stroke, and leaned back on the pillows that propped him up. But the kind and gentle eyes were still there. My mother stood before him a while and then, on impulse, held out her hand to him. Champaklal held it a few seconds. When she began to withdraw her hand, he held on and resisted her pull; then he let her hand slowly go back towards her and, at the last moment, he tugged it towards himself. My mother broke down crying. Later she told me, "Oh, Rob, that man is very special." Yes, Mom, he is indeed very special.

BOB ZWICKER

It is the darkest nights that prepare the greatest dawns — and it is so because it is into the deep inconscience of material life that we have to bring, not an intermediate glimmer, but the full glory of the divine Light.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga — I, CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 296)