

NAMAH

The Journal of Integral Health



Conquering Fear, Doubt
and Scepticism

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1. Watkins PJ. *ABC of Diabetes*. 5th ed. London: Blackwell Publishing; 2003, p. 45.
2. Arrami M, Garner H. A tale of two citations. *Nature* 2008; 451(7177):397-9.
3. Goldacre B. Trivial Disputes. *Bad Science*. Weblog. [Online] Available from: <http://www.badsociety.net/2008/02/trivial-disputes-2/> [Accessed 19th June 2008].

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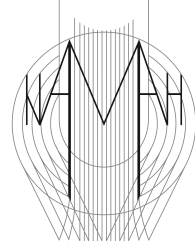
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NAMAH
THE JOURNAL OF INTEGRAL HEALTH

Conquering Fear, Doubt and Scepticism	
<i>The Mother</i>	5
Moving Forward	9
Rediscovering Yoga	
<i>Dr. Alok Pandey</i>	10
Cultivating an Ecological Consciousness	
<i>Lopa Mukherjee</i>	21
Sri Aurobindo's Prevision of a Greater Psychology	
<i>Dr. Soumitra Basu</i>	31
What Resonates with You?	
<i>James Anderson</i>	39
Preparing and Opening the Being to the Higher Force	
<i>Dr. Monica Gulati</i>	45
Surrender Each Moment	
<i>Arul Dev</i>	53
Book Review	64

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In this yoga the whole principle is to open oneself to the Divine Influence. It is there above you and, if you can once become conscious of it, you have then to call it down into you. It descends into the mind and into the body as Peace, as a Light, as a Force that works, as the Presence of the Divine with or without form, as Ananda. Before one has this consciousness one has to have faith and aspire for the opening. Aspiration, call, prayer are forms of one and the same thing and are all effective; you can take the form that comes to you or is easiest to you.

— Sri Aurobindo

Conquering Fear, Doubt and Scepticism*

5 — If mankind only caught a glimpse of what infinite enjoyments, what perfect forces, what luminous reaches of spontaneous knowledge, what wide calms of our being lie waiting for us in the tracts which our animal evolution has not yet conquered, they would leave all and never rest till they had gained these treasures. But the way is narrow, the doors are hard to force, and fear, distrust and scepticism are there, sentinels of Nature, to forbid the turning away of our feet from her ordinary pastures.¹



What Sri Aurobindo has written, the words [“caught a glimpse”] which have been translated as *entrevoiaient*², means to see something in its totality, but for a very brief moment. It is obvious that a constant vision of all these wonders would automatically compel you to set out on the path. It is also certain that a little fragmentary glimpse is not enough — it would not have enough weight to compel you to follow the path.

But if you had a total vision, however brief, you would not be able to resist the temptation of making the effort needed to realise it. But, in fact, the total vision is exceptional, and that is why Sri Aurobindo says to us: “If mankind only... ”

To tell the truth, it very seldom happens that those who are ready, who are undoubtedly meant for realisation, do not have, at a certain moment in their lives, even if only for a few seconds, the experience of what this realisation is.

*Heading is provided by the Editor

¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Birth Centenary Library, Volume 17*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust; 1971, p. 79.

² In the French text of *Thoughts and Aphorisms* read by the Mother

But even those whose destiny is certain have to struggle mightily, resolutely, against this "something" which one seems to take in with the very air one breathes: this fear, this dread of what may happen. And this is so stupid, because, in the final analysis, the destiny of each individual is the same: you are born, you live — more or less satisfactorily — and you die; then you wait for a certain length of time, and again you are born, you live — more or less satisfactorily — and again you die, and so on indefinitely, until you feel you have had enough of it.

Fear of what? Fear of coming out of the rut? Fear of being free? Fear of no longer being a prisoner?

And then, when you have enough courage to overcome this, when you say, "Come what may! After all, there's not much to lose", then you become wary, you wonder if it is reasonable, if it is true, if all that is not an illusion, if you are not just imagining things, if there is really any substance to it... And mind you, this mistrust seems stupid, but you encounter it even in the most intelligent, even in those who have repeatedly had conclusive experiences — it is something that you take in with the food you eat, the air you breathe, your contacts with others; and that is why you can speak of the "tentacles of Nature",³ everywhere, in all things, like an octopus stealing in and catching you and binding you.

Even when you have overcome these two obstacles, when the experiences are so strong that you can no longer doubt, that doubt becomes impossible — like doubting one's own life — then there remains something awful, petty, dry, corrosive: scepticism. And this is founded on human pride, that is why it lasts so long. You want to think that you are above all these things, "Oh, I am not one to fall into those traps! I am a reasonable man, I see things from a practical point of view; I'm not so easily deceived." It is awful!... It is sordid. But it is dangerous. Even in moments of greatest enthusiasm, even when one is filled with an exceptional, marvellous experience — It rises from the lowest depths. It is ugly, slimy, disgusting. And yet it rises, and spoils everything.

To conquer it, one must be a mighty warrior. One must struggle against all the obscurities of Nature, against all her tricks, all her temptations.

Why does she do this? It is as if she were moving away from her own goal. But I have already explained this to you many times. Nature knows very well where she is going and what the outcome is. She wants it, but... in her own way. She does not feel that any time is being wasted. She has all eternity before her. She wants to follow her own way as she likes, meandering as much as she likes, going back on her tracks, straying from the

³ The translation the Mother had before her was based on a text which read "tentacles of Nature" instead of "sentinels of Nature".

straight path, starting the same thing all over again several times to see what will happen. And these enlightened cranks, who want to get there at once, as soon as possible, who thirst for truth, light, beauty, balance — they bother her, they urge her on, they tell her that she is wasting her time. Her time! She always replies, “But I have all eternity before me. Am I in a hurry? Why are you in such a hurry?” And again, with a smile: “Your haste is all too human; widen yourselves, become infinite, be eternal, and you will no longer be in a hurry.”

There is so much fun on the way, for her... but not for everyone.

This is what happens when one sees things from a great height, from a great distance, when one’s view is vast, almost infinite. Everything that upsets human beings and makes them suffer, disappears; so those who are very wise, who have abandoned life for the sake of higher wisdom tell you with a smile, “Why suffer? Come out of it and you will suffer no more.” That is all very well individually but, in fact, if you think about others you may wish this rather tragic comedy would come to an end sooner. And it is very justifiable to feel tired of living like a beast at pasture, of roaming from one patch of grass to another, of ruminating in a corner, of having such narrow horizons and of missing all the splendours of life.

Perhaps it amuses Nature that we should be like that, but we are tired of it, we want to be different.

And that is it. When you have truly had enough of it and want things to be different, then you have the courage, the strength, the capacity to conquer these three terrible enemies: fear, doubt and scepticism. But I repeat, it is not enough to sit down one fine day, watch yourself be, and struggle with these things inside you once and for all. You have to do it and do it again and again and continue in a way which seems almost endless, to be sure that you have got rid of it all. In reality, you are perhaps never truly rid of it, but there comes a time when inside yourself, you are so different that you can no longer be touched by these things. You can see them, but you see them with a smile, and at a simple gesture they go away, back to where they came from, perhaps a little changed, perhaps a little less strong, less obstinate, less aggressive — until the time when the Light is so strong that all darkness vanishes. As for the marvels Sri Aurobindo tells us about, it is better not to describe them, because each individual feels them, undergoes them, experiences them in his own way — and for each person that is the best way. One must not adopt another’s way, one must go one’s own way, then the experience has its full value, its full inestimable value.

And finally, I wish that you may all have these experiences yourselves. And for that, faith, confidence, much humaneness and great goodwill are needed.

Open, aspire, and... wait. It will surely come, the Grace is there. It asks only to be able to work for everyone.

— *The Mother**



* The Mother. *The Collected Works of the Mother, Volume 10*. 2nd ed. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust; 1998, pp. 11-14.

Moving Forward

We live in an era of uncertainties. In a sense, the march of life upon earth has always been shadowed by uncertainty. One could almost say that the only thing certain about life is its uncertainty.

Yet there are two distinct phases through which the stream of life flows, individually as well as collectively. One phase is when life flows relatively smoothly like the river Ganga in its quieter mode. Another when the flow is rough and turbulent like the river Yamuna in her unpredictable moods. What we need to discover is the third stream hidden as an undercurrent, like the lost river Sarasvati. That is the deeper spiritual current that alone can harmonise the other two streams.

Right now, we swing from one to the other. This happens by suppressing one by the other. What is required is a balancing of the two, embracing each other in a harmonious flow. That is the lost river, the lost secret that we are here to discover.



Rediscovering Yoga

Defining Yoga

Over a hundred years back, at the turn of the previous century, Sri Aurobindo wrote in a prophetic vein about the important place that yoga was going to take in the sum total of human activities of the future.

“We are in an age, full of the throes of travail, when all forms of thought and activity that have in themselves any strong power of utility or any secret virtue of persistence are being subjected to a supreme test and given their opportunity of rebirth. The world today presents the aspect of a huge cauldron of Medea in which all things are being cast, shredded into pieces, experimented on, combined and recombined either to perish and provide the scattered material of new forms or to emerge rejuvenated and changed for a fresh term of existence. Indian Yoga, in its essence a special action or formulation of certain great powers of Nature, itself specialised, divided and variously formulated, is potentially one of these dynamic elements of the future life of humanity. The child of immemorial ages, preserved by its vitality and truth into our modern times, it is now emerging from the secret schools and ascetic retreats in which it had taken refuge and is seeking its place in the future sum of living human powers and utilities. But it has first to rediscover itself, bring to the surface the profoundest reason of its being in that general truth and that

unceasing aim of Nature which it represents, and find by virtue of this new self-knowledge and self-appreciation its own recovered and larger synthesis (1).”

This prophecy is becoming true. Yoga has indeed become one of the major gifts of India to the world. With its appeal to a wide range of humanity, independent of religious beliefs and secular views, with an increasing validation by scientific research and acceptance in academic circles, Yoga is fast becoming popular among the different strata of society. Yet it is still ill-understood and its far-reaching effects and impacts are far from being understood. And until we discover or rather rediscover it, — for Yoga is as ancient as the hills — we shall remain deprived of its real potential and left unsatisfied with the husks, while leaving the real grain that hides behind its elaborate systems, techniques and processes.



What then is Yoga? It is most commonly understood as a set of physical and breathing

exercises, meant for physical health and mental well-being. While these things are important for our immediate utilitarian purposes, they are neither the core nor the whole of Yoga. As far as physical health is concerned, its importance lies in the purposes to which we shall put the instrumentality of the body. Besides there are a number of different ways that one can acquire good health. *Āsanas* are one of them. Though here too there is a need to make a distinction between *āsanas* and *yoga āsanas*, as they were once part of the original *Hatha yoga*. A set of exercises does not automatically become yogic unless it is accompanied by certain attitudes and directed towards genuine yogic ends. Therefore, we see in the *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* system of Patañjali, *āsanas* and *prāṇāyāma* occur after the preliminary purification is practised through moral rectitude. It is followed by mastery of the sense-mind, concentration, surrender to and union with God.

Of course the idea of God or *Īśvara* is as wide as the universe, making the system free from the trappings of religion. Yet it brings home the fact that Yoga is not meant for maintaining good health alone but rather the purpose of good health is to ultimately engage in our higher pursuit of the very Highest, the Divine. Good health through *āsanas*, conservation and right flow of life-energies by mastery over the breath is important for this reason. But Patañjali, a great codifier of the then prevalent yogic practices is not the originator of Yoga. Nor does he exhaust all the possibilities of Yoga. Yoga existed much before his classical treatise on *Yoga sūtras* and continued or rather continues to evolve after him. If we take the definition given by *Swami Vivekananda* and endorsed by *Sri Aurobindo*, Yoga is

conscious and concentrated evolution, a compressed evolution instead of the long winding circuitous routes of Nature in her wife wanderings and long preparations and sudden unexpected leaps. *Sri Aurobindo* helps us.

“In the right view both of life and of Yoga all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the secret potentialities latent in the being and — highest condition of victory in that effort — a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos. But all life, when we look behind its appearances, is a vast Yoga of Nature who attempts in the conscious and the subconscious to realise her perfection in an ever-increasing expression of her yet unrealised potentialities and to unite herself with her own divine reality. In man, her thinker, she for the first time upon this Earth devises self-conscious means and willed arrangements of activity by which this great purpose may be more swiftly and puissantly attained. Yoga, as *Swami Vivekananda* has said, may be regarded as a means of compressing one’s evolution into a single life or a few years or even a few months of bodily existence (2).”



Where then does yoga begin, both in the life of the individual as well as in the life of the human race? Or perhaps it existed as a subtle principle or force in nature, drawing all things upwards towards the Divine Origin or Source by a natural attraction or as the 'compelling stuff in things'. For evolution is not unique to man. It is the one happening thing, possibly because of the concealed evolutionary Energy hidden within matter or creation itself.

Yoga systems

If we leave aside the standard academic textbooks about the beginnings of Yoga, we find an interesting account of its beginnings in the *Srimadbhagavad Gītā*. Sri Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna that he gave the ancient Yoga first to *Vivoasvā*, the sun-god. *Vivoasvā* is the name of the sun specific to this *chaturyuga*. In other words, Yoga was first given by the Supreme Godhead, immanent in creation to the guardian of the law

of Truth, *Sanātana Dharma*. Subsequently *Vivoasvā* transmitted it to Manu, the original prototype of Man, as the truth that he must abide by. Subsequently, the Yoga is given to the lineage of kings from the Solar Dynasty, the *Sūryavankshi* king, *Ikṣāku*. But this original Yoga is lost from time to time. When the Yoga is lost and men begin to live by their own fancies and desires and egoistic selfish interests, then the *Sanātana Dharma* declines, *dharmasya glāniḥ*. At each of these points the Divine assumes a human birth to restore the *Dharma* by giving the Yoga again to mankind, at first to a few who are ready and then to humanity at large.

What is the purpose we may ask? As is implicit in the declaration, Yoga is the supreme means to restore the *Dharma*. And *Dharma* here is not religion as we understand today, but the means through which we draw nearer to the Law of Truth and by that we grow in oneness with God, with the Origin and Source. Thus seen, Yoga becomes a means to join the creation of the created with the Creator. Secretly and in their essence they are always one since nothing can exist independent in itself, separate from the one Supreme Source. But it seems parted on the surface because of the various distortions and malalignments that come about due to the complex play of countless forces that mediate between the One Creator and the manifold creation.

It is difficult for the modern mind, blinded by an extremely materialistic vision of science, to understand what Sri Kṛṣṇa, the *Yogeśvara* is saying here. It was difficult even for Arjuna to understand this great declaration by Kṛṣṇa. That is why the eye of faith must lead first before the eye of wisdom can open



and man must learn to recognise that he is nothing in himself and his greatness, if any, lies in his capacity to unite with the Divine. In fact he is here for that. Man is meant to become the bridge between that which is below him and that which is beyond. Matter and Spirit, World and God, Nature and Soul, Earth and the Heavens can come together and join in him harmoniously fulfilling each other. For it is through this union that matter is fulfilled by being touched by the Light Divine as a lamp lights up as the current passes through its wires. The body is the lamp and the Divine is the Source of Light while the wire that joins the two is the soul of man. True Yoga begins in its real sense only after we discover our secret soul now hidden and covered by our nature. Before that there are various kinds of preparations but the real Yoga has not yet begun in its true sense. On the other hand Yoga also fulfils God in Creation by drawing things closer to the original Divine Plan. Sri Aurobindo reveals the supreme human aim in these powerful words, "To fulfil God in life is man's manhood (3)."

Yogic practices therefore can be either a preparation or else a means of moving towards this great aim. If we take Yoga in this original sense of union with the Divine or our Highest Self or the Source, then it implies at least three main elements. There is of course a fourth element, which is the matrix in which it is taking place. By Matrix we mean the gestalt or sum total elements of Time, Place, Circumstances. None of these elements have an absolute hold on the practice of Yoga but they do play a certain part in the eventual results. These differ from person to person. The rule of standardising everything does not work in psychological

matters, — and "Yoga is nothing but practical psychology (4)," as Sri Aurobindo puts it. It works even less in spiritual matters. If we take a vertical axis from Matter to Spirit then we can say that the consciousness involved in Matter ascends or emerges through increasing degrees of freedom. That is why it is never a good idea to outwardly imitate a truly spiritual person. What is important instead, is to ascend to the inner Freedom to which he has climbed by following the path he has been shown.

Of course spiritual freedom is different from our ideas of freedom. The freedom that we understand and wish to have is the freedom to do as we like, to get what we like, to be what we like. From the spiritual point of view the only freedom, the true freedom lies in the union with the Divine and thereby manifesting and expressing His Will in and through our life and actions. This Divine Will, like Truth, cannot be fixed into any standard formula. However, what we ordinarily call freedom is in fact bondage to ego and ignorance. Yoga is the way to free ourselves from Ignorance and gives us freedom from all that binds us to desires and attachments and their results — grief, error, suffering, fear, greed, ambition, and lust.

The seeker, the sought and the path



Coming back to the three main elements or consenting parties, as Sri Aurobindo puts it:

“In practice three conceptions are necessary before there can be any possibility of Yoga; there must be, as it were, three consenting parties to the effort, — God, Nature and the human soul or, in more abstract language, the Transcendental, the Universal and the Individual. If the individual and Nature are left to themselves, the one is bound to the other and unable to exceed appreciably her lingering march. Something transcendent is needed, free from her and greater, which will act upon us and her, attracting us upward to Itself and securing from her by good grace or by force her consent to the individual ascension (5).”

The seeker is defined by the intensity and sincerity of his or her aspiration. That which is sought for the union, the Divine Source or Origin, is limited by our own conceptions. What stands between the two is the whole field of Nature with a world of forces that help or hinder, assist or resist the journey. The seeker is not defined by the technique, though a faithful pursuance of a given method or technique does indicate the sincerity of effort in his pursuit. But it does not indicate the purpose of his pursuit, the goal he has put before himself, the aim of his efforts. That goal, that aim and the sincerity in pursuing his aim is written in his aspiration. This is known only to the Divine in his heart or, if he is sincere, then to his own awakened consciousness. A given technique may make you an extremely skilful archer, perhaps even the best as far as the science and art of archery goes. That is what Bhiṣma and Droṇācārya

and Karṇa are. Yet the crown of victory and the wisdom of the *Gītā* are given to Arjuna. Though he too is among the best, yet he has something in him that is missing in the others. Others are fighting for the kingdom of their promise or driven by ambition to be proven the best. But what makes Arjuna special is that initially he wants to fight only for the highest Ideal and when that failed him through the insufficiency of light, he fights in obedience to Kṛṣṇa and his trust in the Divine leading. Most modern movements of yoga miss upon this crucial element even as they miss upon the *adhikāra bheda*. Moved often with a will to enrol and increase disciples, a spiritual ambition so to say, they forget that not all are ready for the spiritual life. Of course, fundamentally none is debarred from the Yoga yet it is equally true that not all are ready for the yoga. It is not a judgment for life but a truth of the moment. One who is not ready today can become ready tomorrow, in fact will become ready someday. But to push someone into Yoga when the soul is not yet ripe is neither good for the person nor for the movement.

It is this knowledge of the *adhikāra bheda* (readiness for the path) that prompted the *Vedic Ṛṣis* to write in cryptic language. It is also for this reason that there is no concept of outer or forced conversion in Hindu thought. True conversion must happen as a natural need. But wherever it is forced through fear and lure, the Yoga is lost and its spirit escapes, leaving an empty shell, plastered with soulless mechanical rituals and blood-stained thrones, where the heady wine of politics and religion mix in the chalice and destroy both. No doubt politics, like everything, must awaken to its own spiritual possibilities but for that the

leaders have to be genuinely and inwardly spiritual rather than merely believers in a doctrine enforced by the sword and the law.

The Divine Law that the aspirant for Yoga is called upon to follow is not a rigid narrow dogma, for that would be contrary to the vastness and freedom of the Spirit. It is rather a wide and supple leading, a guidance that takes into account the entirety of things including the individual variations of nature, the stage of development, the real motive of *sādhanā*, the past formations and present personalities, the inner complexity, the future destiny, above all God's secret Intent working itself out in the cosmos through the individual. No book or religious injunction can provide this, least of all human interpretation of the Divine Law as revealed in 'a sacred text'. Since very few minds are supple and vast and discerning enough to feel the true inspiration leading from Above or awakened to the promptings of the secret psychic being rising from within, the safe rule is to follow the guidance of the living Guru. In his absence the priest is supposed to substitute.

But to be a priest in the true sense means to be fully awake in the soul and be identified with it. But a priest who is simply echoing scholarly interpretation of 'a sacred text' or is caught up in sophisticated dialectics and opinions because the eye of wisdom has not opened is, as the *Upaniṣad* puts it, like the blind leading the blind towards the abyss via the heavenly route. It is for this reason that the *Gītā* asks the disciple to go beyond the word of the scripture, *sabdabrahma atī vartate*. One could equally say to go behind the word and reach out to the inner truth embedded in the body of sound symbols.

Sri Aurobindo affirms:

"For the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga it is necessary to remember that no written Shastra, however great its authority or however large its spirit, can be more than a partial expression of the eternal Knowledge. He will use, but never bind himself even by the greatest Scripture. Where the Scripture is profound, wide, catholic, it may exercise upon him an influence for the highest good and of incalculable importance. It may be associated in his experience with his awakening to crowning verities and his realisation of the highest experiences. His Yoga may be governed for a long time by one Scripture or by several successively, — if it is in the line of the great Hindu tradition, by the Gita, for example, the Upanishads, the Veda. Or it may be a good part of his development to include in its material a richly varied experience of the truths of many Scriptures and make the future opulent with all that is best in the past. But in the end he must take his station, or better still, if he can, always and from the beginning he must live in his own soul beyond the limitations of the word that he uses. The Gita itself thus declares that the Yogin in his progress must pass beyond the written Truth, — '*sabdabrahmātivartate*' — beyond all that he has heard and all that he has yet to hear, — '*śrotavyasya śrutasya ca*. For he is not the sadhaka of a book or of many books; he is a sadhaka of the Infinite (6)."



This profound statement, uttered from the lips of two of the greatest yogis of all times, Sri Kṛṣṇa and Sri Aurobindo, are such an antidote to the quarrel and fight we see in different religions over the superiority of one scripture over the other. The true purpose of a scripture is not debating about it but in living it. Life is the mirror that reveals what we have understood about it. It is the mirror that does not lie. The worth of a man or the religion he professes does not lie in a book or many books but in his way of life, his approach towards circumstances, his understanding about himself and others, not only in terms of what one is but what one can become with or without a scripture. The greatness of man is not so much in what he is or in his systems of beliefs and ability to win in an argument and his belief systems but in what he has faith in and wills to be. It is these two psychological powers, faith and will, that determine what we can become. Where we may find ourselves presently in terms of our constitution and capacities is the result of our past but what we yet can become is the result of our faith and will in ourselves, in our destiny and in the Divine Power that moves all things. It is these two central powers that all yoga utilises to the maximum to accelerate our evolution.

The universal Path

“The Yoga that we practise is not for ourselves alone, but for the Divine; its aim is to work out the will of the Divine in the world, to effect a spiritual transformation and to bring down a divine nature and a divine life into the mental, vital and physical nature and life of humanity. Its object is not personal Mukti, although Mukti is a necessary condition of the yoga, but the liberation and

transformation of the human being. It is not personal Ananda, but the bringing down of the divine Ananda — Christ’s kingdom of heaven, our Satyayuga attracting us upward to Itself and securing from her by good grace or by force her consent to the individual ascension upon the earth. Of *mokṣa* we have no personal need; for the soul is *nityamukta* and bondage is an illusion. We play at being bound but we are not really bound. We can be free when God wills; for he, our supreme Self, is the master of the game, and without his grace and permission no soul can leave the game. It is often God’s will in us to take through the mind the *bhoga* of ignorance, of the dualities, of joy and grief, of pleasure and pain, of virtue and sin, of enjoyment and renunciation: for long ages, in many countries, he never even thinks of the yoga but plays out this play century after century without wearying of it. There is nothing evil in this, nothing which we need condemn or from which we need shrink, — it is God’s play. The wise man is he who recognises this truth and knowing his freedom, yet plays out God’s play, waiting for his command to change the methods of the game....

“The first process of the yoga is to make the *saṅkalpa* of *ātmasamarpana*. Put yourself with all your heart and all your strength into God’s hands. Make no conditions, ask for nothing, not even for *siddhi* in the yoga, for nothing at all, except that in you and through you his will may be directly performed. To those who demand from him, God gives what they demand, but to those who give themselves and demand nothing, he gives everything that they might otherwise have asked or needed and in addition he gives himself and the spontaneous boons of his love.

“The next process is to stand aside and watch the working of the divine power in yourself. This working is often attended with disturbance and trouble in the system, therefore faith is necessary, though perfect faith is not always possible at once; for whatever impurity is in you, harboured openly or secretly lurking, is likely to rise at first and be repeated so long as it is not exhaustively swept out, and doubt in this age is an almost universal impurity. But even when doubt assails, stand by and wait for it to pass, availing yourself if possible of the *satsanga* of those who are already advanced on the path, but when that is absent, still holding fast to the principle of the yoga, self-surrender. When distressed within or assailed from without, remember the words of the Gita (7).”



This does not mean following one's whims and fancies, for no *sādhana* can mean that, but to discover and discern the illumining fire within the word rather than be caught up in analysing its outer body. Priesthood in this sense is a sacerdoxy but now it has become largely a matter of appointment for political and other vested interests. This has further led to the downfall of organised religions that die burdened with the volumes of interpretations,

especially when they are tainted with political ambitions. Interpretations as such is philosophical or practical rendering of spiritual truths and unless the interpreter has glimpsed something of the Glory of the Spirit, it is bound to take more and more a dead academic intellectual form rather than the power of the living Word. At best it can be a preparation for the mind and the intellect. At worst it can be a prison fastened with bars of rigid dogma. That is why we see the Mother and Sri Aurobindo cautioning us against the tendency to quote them. Often out of context and without sufficient background in the totality of their writings or the actual journey of Yoga, these powerful luminous words can easily change into misquotes even where the reproduction of the phrase is accurate. The Scripture is no doubt a great help on the path and few if any can dispense with it. It is the living Word-body of the Master and its value and power can never be overstated. But to truly derive the utmost benefit from it there is a need to delve deep into its meaning that far exceeds the dictionary usage of the term. Above all, it must be put into practice. To add to it, especially with reference to the writings of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother advised that to know what he is revealing to us we must understand everything that he has said on a given subject. The same applies to the Mother's works as well.

The second aspect, in terms of recognition by the seeker, is the Divine with whom the disciple seeks to become one. The truer truth hidden at first and often for a long time from the disciple is that He whom he seeks is in fact calling him. It is the Divine who calls

the soul when it is ready to heed but in the disciple this call is felt as an aspiration or an irresistible attraction towards the Divine in one or several of His aspects. The choice of the aspect towards which the disciple is drawn depends partly on his past evolution and partly on the ultimate destiny of the soul. The Divine is Infinite but human consciousness dwells in the sense of the finite. It cannot at once conceive of the infinity of God and needs limited aspects through which it is drawn towards the One. It is this profound understanding that we see displayed in the *Sanātana Dharma* which accepts and caters for a wide variety of approaches to the Divine. Each aspect is often represented by a god through whom the seeker can climb to the One. For what else are the gods but the many aspects of the One Divine. Each is unique in a certain sense and enjoys a certain degree of freedom in his action which yet derives its Knowledge and Power from the One Infinite. Yet the seeker may remain tied to the charm and glory and greatness of one or another aspect for long.

To prevent this possibility of getting held back or held within the ambit of a god originally meant to climb through the stairway of the gods to the One Supreme, the *Sanātana Dharma* placed the Guru above all. We are well aware of the *Guru Stotram* that explicitly states that one has to see all the gods and even the Supreme *Para Brahman* in the Guru. While in the Integral Yoga, the relation of the disciple with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is not confined to the traditional Guru and *Śiṣya*, yet Sri Aurobindo agrees with the importance given to the Guru in the practice of Yoga. However, it is equally

important to understand that not all are Gurus regardless of self-proclaim and not all Gurus are the same, though they all come from the same Source. Each represents some aspect or the other of the Divine. There are Gurus who point the way but do not walk with us. There are others who intervene from time to time, keeping a watch as we go along, as a cowherd keeps a watch over his cattle even while leaving them free to graze in the open ground. Some do not take any responsibility beyond showing the way and giving a teaching. Others take the responsibility and the burden of the disciple, hold him through all his struggles and stumbles and ensures that he reaches the Supreme. Each shows us a facet of the Divine, each point towards a door to the Beyond.

The important thing to realise is that though the Divine is infinite, yogis seldom experience the Divine in His totality, *samagram mam*. Our experience of the Divine is limited by our faith and natural predilection towards one or other aspect of the Divine. The aspect of the Divine we meet depends also on our approach. The seeker after knowledge, approaching through his mind, often finds himself in a vast Impersonal peace of Immobility where knowledge rests in blissful Light. The *sadhak* who enters through the doors of devotion and love finds his lover waiting for him and even ready to carry him safe in arms of Love and Delight. The worker and servant of God finds the Divine Master who rules over all creatures by His sovereign Will. Each emphasises his own approach and way, thereby leading to cults and groups and sects each of which narrows down to one approach in which the Guru

has specialised.

This may be fine with those looking for a door of escape, but it is certainly not for the one engaged in the Yoga of transformation. The seeker on the path of an integral yoga is called upon to discover the Divine everywhere and in everything. Not only is he to discover, but also to express, to eventually manifest the Divine in each and every activity. Surely the first contact with the Divine may be conditioned by our unique constitution, faith and approach. That is why we see that there are differences even among those who have realised the Divine in one aspect or the other. There are common elements of the life-changing experience, a reversal of consciousness which completely changes our way of looking, understanding and responding to life. The contact with the Divine in any of His many aspects invariably brings a deep inner peace and a state of felicity. It is often accompanied by an opening to the doors of knowledge that transcend our ordinary reason. One is freed from the false identification of

the ego-individuality and the temporary personality built by nature for one brief life. A luminous vastness, a stable permanence is felt behind the flux and flow of nature. But there are also unique aspects of relationship with the Divine. After all, the world was not created for sameness. Unity in diversity and not unity in uniformity is the purpose of existence.

It is here that there is a great need for caution. When we force or impose one aspect of the Divine, either as the highest or worse still as the only exclusive truth of the Divine, then we open the doors to fanaticism and bigotry. Even with regard to the Guru in whom the ancient traditions demand absolute fidelity should not be turned into a war of sects and cults to prove one's Master as the highest or the only one. It is this narrowness which turns a great truth into dangerous falsehood. The great truth is that one must see the Supreme in one's Master and be faithful and surrendered to him. The dangerous falsehood is to want all others to believe that your Master is the sole Representative of God and the one and only human image of the Supreme. The revelation of the Supreme in a human form is an inner truth which can easily turn into falsehood by misapplying this into a doctrine to be imposed formally and through outer means. It is what turns spiritual teaching into a formal organised religion that traps the human soul into fixed belief systems from which an escape in one life is often difficult.

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— Dr. Alok Pandey



Cultivating an Ecological Consciousness

Lopa Mukherjee

Abstract

This article talks about the human disconnection from Nature and how it is causing pathologies in man. It provides various solutions that eco-therapists can use and which can be taught in schools to develop ecological intelligence. Some of the solutions already exist as traditional ecological knowledge and have been re-purposed for modern situations. Some have been invented by residents of urban nature-less zones. But above all, this article invites people to tune themselves in to the nurturing vibrations of Mother Earth and her gifts of flowers and trees, not just for their personal well-being, but for the future of the planet. There is an urgency in this calling, for man has wronged nature long enough and, in the process, has hurt himself the most.



Ecological unconscious

For many centuries, a large portion of humanity has lived segregated from nature in technological Faraday cages, insulated from bugs and germs, and beauty and sentience. The natural world does not penetrate their habitat; and the concrete, steel and

petrochemical lifestyle keeps her away. She peeps in as creepers in cracked walls and shakes humanity with her weather tantrums. But before this age, when she is regarded as a woman who needs to be tamed, she was worshipped as a mother and goddess. Five hundred years of the Age of Reason is twenty generations, which is a long time. Now the

rational man, tormented by pathologies, cannot find medicines that cure his mental problems using mental techniques alone. When he allows plants and animals to come into his life, he begins to unravel these problems. The mind sits at the feet of the wise old ways, begging to be cured.

One of the pioneers in the field of eco-psychology, Theodore Roszak (1), calls the human bond with Nature the “ecological unconscious”. Just as the collective unconscious of psychology, we are born with this collective angst, as though it is part of our genetic material. Even if we were lucky to be nurtured in an eco-friendly society, when we move to techno-cities, we imbibe it from the field. This field is created by the thoughts and feelings of people sharing a common space, which get transmitted to others, without their being aware of it. There is denial, guilt, helplessness, nostalgia, anger, fear. The pathologies show up in dreams as something we are chasing but cannot find. We may see doomsday images of ashes and volcanic fires. Forests burn down and animals run in all directions.

All these scenes are occurring somewhere, and even if we are unaware of them in our waking state, they affect the system, of which we are a part. We erupt on our family members for minor reasons, and we cannot explain our actions. Sometimes we feel incomplete even if we have every conceivable material need met. We sense a natural disaster that is occurring far away and it causes us panic attacks. Our literature mirrors our state of disconnect. There is a taste for horror, for gore and blood, for unnatural pleasures, for wickedness, for destruction, for causing pain and feeling no remorse for it.

Self-healing remedies

To remedy our own ecological discomforts, we start connecting with the secret life of plants and creatures. We read literature that connects to nature. We read mythologies, folktales, and children’s literature. Mythologies around the world have Nature as characters in their drama. Daphne turns into a laurel tree in Greek mythology; an eagle fights the abductor who is stealing the queen Sita in the Indian epic, *Rāmāyana*. We participate empathically with the people whose lives are being uprooted, say, due to new hydro-electric power plants or mining projects. We protest the destruction of the habitat of birds and forest creatures, and of forest-dwellers such as honey-makers and herbal medicine-gatherers. If the hydro-electric power plant solves bigger issues, we think of alternative habitats for the displaced people. If the timber is cut for luxury items, we voice our indignation, we take them up with the authorities, we involve environmental scientists to weigh in. Even if we do not participate in these movements directly, we fight for their cause in spirit. We become advocates in our circle of influence. The small talks in social gatherings veer around these issues, and we spread the awareness. Someone who is tormented by ecologically-induced pathologies can then



take appropriate action. To apply Traditional Ecological Knowledge, TEK, we can learn from indigenous elders in our community, or in other regions of the world. This way the knowledge is preserved and propagated.

Fortunately, not all land-based cultures are completely uprooted. There are Elders in most indigenous communities who are holders of knowledge. Some communities honour them as *shamans* and go to them as a last resort when all treatment fails, as is mentioned in the story of the man who was bitten by a poisonous snake and became a cripple until he met a *shaman* who used “magic” to cure him (2). The Amazonian people, who mix the exact two plants from hundreds of species to produce the *ayahuasca* potion, know the formula because the spirits of the plants talk to them. Medicine men in Central America ask the permission of plants before they pluck medicinal herbs from them. The spirit of the plant is deified, or rather it is seen as it truly is — a divine being. Pacific island sailors know how to sense the distance from land when out at sea by watching and listening to the sound of waves against their boats. Predicting rain and harvest were done by nature specialists by reading the position of stars. These survival techniques are valuable memes that need to be passed down, just as a language needs to be passed down to safeguard certain truths that can only be expressed in that language.

Political ecology

Some practices from the land-honouring age of civilisations have been passed down the generations. In modern times, often they are performed as rituals and their meanings are forgotten. One of them is called, *Itu poojo*,

worship of the Sun. A few weeks before the planting season, seeds of various grains are grown in a small pot. The grains that germinate are the ones to be planted for that season. It is considered as nature’s message that she favours this species of rice or lentil for this season in this region. But industrial agriculture is deaf to these messages.

Firstly, native species are not grown, because agricultural science, based on statistics gathered in some other country, dictates that such or such a crop needs to be planted. Secondly, there are governmental pressures on farmers to buy seeds from just a handful of multi-national companies. Thirdly, the seeds are tampered with genetic modification. The goal is short-term high yield, but at the cost of soil depletion and nutritional quality. Some of these non-native species need fertilisers, and more water than the land can provide. Monocultures are forced down on farmers to increase yield.



Monocultures are not nature’s way of growing food. A variety of plants forming a food basket need to be considered to measure yield. A balanced diet needs this basket, not just the staple crop. To counter ecological injustice eco-activist Vandana Shiva has created a granary-cum-training centre,

where she collects indigenous seeds she can distribute to farmers, and also train people to do conscious farming. She is tapping into the wisdom of the old ways. Her centre is called *Navdanya*, which is a short name for *Nava Dhanya*, meaning "nine grains." These are the nine grains that ancient Indian wisdom said would benefit both human and soil health.

Corporate agriculture is a many-headed *hydra*. The Green Revolution of the 1980s was a loan package for developing countries from the developed nations, to buy the seeds and fertilisers supplied by the loan-granters. This does not sound much different from selling weapons to the Third World to solve their internal conflicts. The profiteering cartels are from the same places, and the victims are the same. The neo-colonised nations lose their native seeds, their soil gets polluted with chemicals, the water gets depleted as the foreign strains need more water. Above all, the food is nutritionally poor and adulterated. Only for the sake of quantity of harvest is such a high price paid. When the monoculture is a cash crop such as cotton, the entire region can suffer famine because food is not grown any more. Often the data used to prove suitability of a crop is inapplicable to the particularity of the land. The glamour of numbers is intimidating, just as a person wearing a suit can be, in a room where the others are wearing plumes and homespun.

Another battle to reclaim indigenous land and knowledge is the battle against biopiracy. The technique of making *basmati* rice and the medicinal value of neem, to take two examples, were developed centuries ago in India. The patent office is a new phenomenon, a baby of technocracy. Although it sounds incredible that these products and

methodologies can be appropriated and patented, this is a battle eco-activists have to fight. The patent filers are in the West, where these two genera of plants do not even grow (3).

Another sinister fall-out of modernity and its fruit, capitalism, is the world food problem. It is not because of shortage, but because of improper distribution, as many economists point out. Grains are dumped in the ocean to control the stock market prices, while a nation that has had a bad season starves. Essential commodities are traded as service commodities, which is another reason farmers get wiped out in a day. The value of their labour is laid to waste because someone with monetary power can decide to dump the stocks of a certain essential commodity. Starvation is also caused by forcing communities to grow cash crops at the expense of food crops. When flowers fetch more money from European auctions than rice that feeds the natives, farmers choose to grow flowers. History repeats itself when left to market forces. In 1848, in East India, millions died of a man-made famine. The reason was that rice was then replaced with indigo plantations. Indigo was the first dye for cotton yarn, and was highly sought after in Europe. Indigo and opium were the cash crops of that age. The narrative has hardly changed, although nations are now free, and therefore free to practise free trade.

To protect against food insecurity, governments have put policies in place. They are most often: local crop protection; price control, a public distribution system and common granaries; subsidies and incentives to farmers. These techniques are practised by all nations, whether socialist, authoritarian communist

or capitalist democracies. Developed nations that knocked on the doors of Asian countries to open up their markets and go bullish on capitalism, are themselves protecting their own farmers by restricting imports. Let us consider the example of India to illustrate the governmental measures in place to counter market forces and monsoonal irregularities. There is a governmental price control on essential foods such as rice, lentils, cooking oils, sugar. The government buys these products from private farmers and stores them in granaries across the country. Each family gets to buy a certain quota of these products at an affordable price. These measures were implemented after several years of crop failure and famine. As for subsidies, most countries give cheap water and electricity to farmers, and grant generous loans. But no government can protect its people from natural disasters. Earthquakes, *tsunamis*, long-term droughts, massive floods, — are moments when humanity realises the enormous power of the Being they wanted to outsmart.



Nature is intelligent

Nature is smart and sentient. She listens to humans and provides healing if we give her the chance. She fades away and dies if she is ill-treated psychologically. She reacts to aggressors and can protect herself. There

are many ways plants show evidence of intelligence. Some of them are propagation manoeuvres, distress signalling or healing a sick member. Plants fix nitrogen in the soil and enrich it for future generation of plants. Mother redwood trees provide nutrition to daughter trees through the roots. The *mycelia*, a fungi network under the earth, senses a sick tree and channels nutrients to her. This same network of fungi can cure depression in a human being when they touch the soil with their bare hands. The edges of roots are the brains that probe around the soil and take the path that is best for the plant (4). The mechanisms in which some plants form symbiotic relationships with others who can be their host, is another amazing phenomenon. When bugs come to eat a plant, this attacked plant secretes a smell that attracts the enemy of the bug. This is pure cunning and a marvel. The plants match the attacking pest's chemicals to its predator insect or bird. When we catalogue the different ways in which plants propagate themselves, we are left amazed and wonder how we ever marvelled at human technological inventions. There are helicopter seeds that float in air. Some have corkscrew-like endings that burrow into the earth where they land. Oak seeds are so strong they can travel long distances in the stomach of animals, untouched by digestive acids. A forest fire is needed to pop open the seeds. They are naturally preserved for posterity. Humans now imitate these with 'seed bombing'. Seeds are covered in a shell of clay and scattered, sometimes from helicopters, to cover a wide area. The seeds use rain and sunshine to anchor themselves and grow into trees (5). Learning from nature and adopting her ways is called biomimicry and it is a growing movement, full of empathy and gratitude for nature.



Individual action

With the consciousness of plants seeping into mainstream discourses, thanks to global warming, people are taking individual and collective actions to fight ecological devastation. There is a growing group of gardeners in the most congested and built-up cities of the world, not to mention the most polluted cities. Balcony and terrace gardening are common. Indoor plants are creeping in homes and offices. These individual planters have formed a social networking system where they help each other by providing tips and connecting buyers to sellers. The techniques of aeroponics and hydroponics are spreading.

Gardening has many benefits — healthy eating being just one. Soil has a property of curing depression and relieving stress. Plants become friends, or babies one tends to. One does not feel lonely. One gets into a flow state when gardening (6). I interviewed a friend who calls herself a ‘plantaholic’. She has a large patio garden in Delhi, one of the most polluted cities in the world. She likes the challenge of growing difficult plants. She has no children of her own and I believe all her motherly love is showered on plants. She feels proud to show off her thriving children, and anxious when a plant child gets sick. She rushes home to check on it after a workday. She buys special screens to adjust the sunlight

on her plants. When I asked her about the effect plants have on her, this is what she shared:

“The joy and challenge of being able to root a cutting. Once it roots, fondly remembering the person who gave me the cutting every time I see the plant. The joy of seeing a new leaf, tightly curled, slowly unfurl and stretch itself. The joy of seeing a seed germinate. For days and weeks, there’s only soil and suddenly you see a shoot. Often, the seed is still on the shoot, perched like a rakish hat. The joy and challenge of figuring out the different needs of the different plants — water, light, sun, pH level of the soil, air. The absolute beauty of the different colours, shapes, textures.

“The patience gardening engenders — you can’t hurry a plant along. Composting for my plants, knowing I’m reducing our landfill contribution, and the smell of fresh earth after the compost is ready. And pests too, knowing that they too are part of the cycle of growth and decay. Learning about companion plants and beneficial insects. For example, now I look forward to the blue banded Australian bee, which haunts my *Dieffenbachia* around this time — don’t know why the bee likes that plant. And because I watch trees and plants so much, I slowly became a by-the-by birdwatcher too, and realised that Delhi isn’t just home to crows, mynahs, pigeons. It has an astonishing variety of birds. Exasperation with myself for not figuring out why some plant isn’t doing well. And sometimes, but very rarely, with the plant — some are total divas — to be fair to them, they are genetically programmed to grow on the Amazon Forest floor and here you are, trying to coax them to live in a smoggy city with 5-10 Celsius winter

temperatures and 40-45 Celsius summer temperatures. Bewilderment: you've tried it all — full shade, full sun, semi-shade, filtered sunlight; water regularly, water only when the top two inches of the soil are dry, water only the leaves, water just the base; provide more nutrition, add more sand or perlite for better drainage; and yet some plants don't do well. I have liberally stood in front of my *Senecio Rowleyanus* and asked her, 'What do you want?' Awe: when you see the mind-boggling variety of plants? Admiration: the way a seedling struggles up through the soil. Pity: when my tomato plant was attacked by four pest varieties all at once."



At the community level, common gardens have helped entire communities thrive. The food benefits are the least of the benefits. There is a variant of community gardening called 'guerrilla gardening'. Ron Finley, from a depressed neighbourhood in Los Angeles, tells in his TED talk how he became a guerrilla gardener (7). The people in his community were suffering from curable diseases because they could not buy good food. They were paying more for medicines than healthy food. Los Angeles has a lot of empty plots. He

picked one in his neighbourhood and started planting. When the fruits and vegetables grew, he told people anyone could take them. If they wanted to help him, they could come with a shovel. This had many salutary effects on the community. Work done voluntarily is itself a source of joy; it is fulfilling, non-judgmental, and enhances one's life with new meaning. The youngsters who could have become gangsters worked the land to produce food. It is an act of creation as fulfilling as producing a painting. Ron Finley calls himself a graffiti artist. His medium is the soil and plants his paintings. Not only did crime reduce in the community, the people became physically and mentally healthy. Working the plants helps one tune in to the subtle vibration of plants. Gradually this becomes a numinous connection that touches the soul. Healing then occurs spontaneously. Those who have difficulty associating with people begin to relax and communicate at a deeper level with others. They feel a sense of achievement which brings self-confidence with it.

The first government sponsored community gardens in the United States were called 'Victory Gardens', grown by veterans who returned from the World Wars after the victory of the Allied Forces. They were employed to bridge the food gap, but greater benefits were discovered in their overall state of being. Now there is research evidence to prove how PTSD can be treated by communion with nature — be it gardening or hanging out with nature (8). Community gardens are used to train youth in growing plants. This training helps them appreciate the effort that goes into planting, growing, harvesting and transporting food to their homes. It makes them conscious of not wasting food. It also encourages them to

choose local over transported food. When one sees one's neighbourhood looking beautiful, one feels happy. At the same time people who become conscious of the food cycle, take to eco-stewardship and demand systemic reform. Eco-therapists are increasing in number and conventional therapists are bringing in nature into their therapy room or sometimes doing the therapy in a natural spot.

Cultivating an eco-friendly consciousness

The love for plants does not stop there. It becomes a love for all creatures, especially those that are victims of human exploitation. One becomes a spokesperson for habitat preservation, saving the whales and elephants from poaching, saving the earth from carbon emission and fracking. It does not stop there either. One feels like re-learning the culture of elders whose knowledge could have saved the earth from its present state of environmental depredation.

One goes to stay in eco-villages, such as Sadhana Forest in Auroville, India. Every year, hundreds of students from all over the world live for a few weeks in this permaculture-driven community and learn techniques of water efficient irrigation, clean energy, and other sustainable methodologies. They bring back their knowledge to their communities and green their turf. Sadhana Forest is in Auroville, which is an international community experimenting on human unity. The founder of Auroville is a spiritual figure called the Mother. She was born in France as Mirra Alfassa, and spent the last fifty years of her life in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, where she was the 'Managing Director' and Spiritual Guide. She was a trained occultist and could communicate

with the natural world.



The Mother could sense the special vibration of every flower. She gave each a spiritual name, such as dahlias were *Nobility*, the pomegranate flower, *Divine Love*, the yellow chrysanthemum was *Life Energy*, and jasmine, *Purity*, and so on for hundreds of flowers, including the flowers of vegetables. When an unnamed flower was brought to her, she could feel the vibration of the flower and sense its essence (9). When she went to the garden, vegetables that were ripe cried out, "Me! Me! Me!" and all she had to do was pick them (10).

The school she established in the Ashram is well-tuned to nature. Once a week, the children attend a class in an estate some 20 miles from the city. Here they get to work in the gardens and learn botany. During the harvest season, they help with the harvesting. They are taught about cows and hens by looking at these animals in the farm. There is an aquarium maintained by the students who are diving enthusiasts. A group of dogs loll around the school, and play with the students

and have become community pets.

Flowers from the many gardens are brought to the ashram where a team of ladies make garlands for floral decorations. In India jasmine garlands are worn by ladies as hair ornaments and hung in cars as protective talismans. Flowers are offered to deities in temples and homes; and the flower market is as busy as a vegetable market.

Another community that emphasises nature-based education is *Shantiniketan* in West Bengal. This was started by Rabindranath Tagore, one of the most famous poets of modern India. Here students sit under trees for classes. Art students have ample scope to draw village life as the university is in a rural setting. In the annual spring festival, women dye their sarees orange by soaking them in a solution of night jasmine flowers. They make ear-rings, necklaces and crowns of flowers. A song and dance performance follows that invokes Spring, personified and deified.

Conclusion

Once we start loving our Mother Earth, we begin to reclaim her and at the same time a neglected part in ourselves too. We then connect to this Being and listen to her deeply, we ask her how we can become instruments in her healing. She may answer us differently depending on where we live, what power we command and our inner capacities. She may ask one to concentrate on planting trees, collecting seeds, distributing to different communities. To another she may ask to write stories to spread the message of the R's — recycle, reduce, re-use, repair, refuse. Another may hear that activism is her calling.

She could join one of the many groups or form her own chapter. She could contact her local newspaper or the government representative. Another may want to become a professor of eco-psychology, or an eco-therapist. Someone may want to organise nature camps for children, or work as a volunteer to clean up the roads, the beach, or hiking spots.

When I started learning about eco-therapy, I found a shift in my consciousness towards nature. There is now a heightened awareness of nature's beauty and her intelligence. I can connect with friends who have green thumbs and find their plant-love to be fulfilling. I appreciate my parents better since they have been growing plants all their life on land that was bigger than the plot on which they built our house. As they grow old and find it hard to work on the land, they tend to potted plants and spend a lot of time nurturing them. Our house has vases of flowers all over. My parents brought flowers from the market that we did not grow at home, such as lotuses and lilies. As these bloomed, they created an atmosphere of charm at home.



The Ashram in Pondicherry is one of the most decorated places on earth and every piece of

decoration is a flower. Several gardens grow flowers just for the Ashram. The inner chamber has Ikebana experts doing artwork every day, balancing the shape and colour of the vases with the flowers of the season, choreographing with the other vases and creating an awe-inspiring beauty. To think that each flower has a special spiritual significance and that they are pouring out their qualities to whoever can receive them is an overwhelming thought. One can only kneel in gratitude and pray for Nature to be healed and lead humanity towards a harmonious future.

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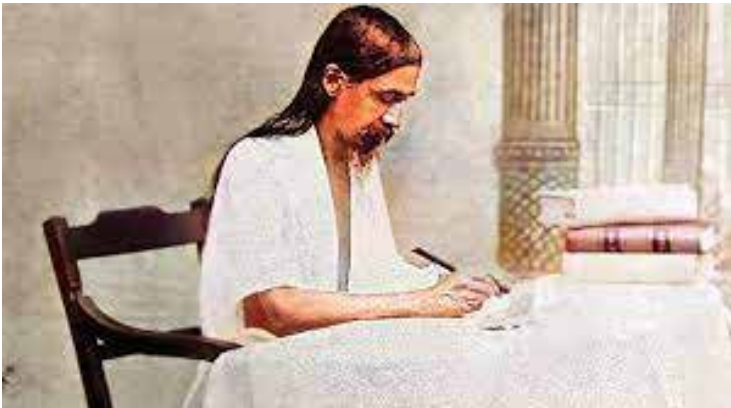
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Sri Aurobindo's Prevision of a Greater Psychology

Dr. Soumitra Basu

Abstract

Psychology is the study of consciousness and its operations in Nature. Consciousness is the creative force of existence that is the inmost reality of everything (the poise of the Self or soul) and the Conscious-Force that builds the worlds. The soul-status shifts when one goes from the lower Nature to the Higher Nature, free from the ego. Psychology may begin as a natural science but deals with the supraphysical and ends with a metaphysical enquiry.



William James' seminal work, *The Principles of Psychology*, appeared in 1890. He defined psychology as the description and explanation of states of consciousness in human beings. He had, of course, visualised psychology as a "natural science". When, years later, the transpersonal movement reinstated consciousness in psychology in the 1960s, it treated psychology as a "human science (1)". A human science, in contrast to a natural science,

had its own unique and innovative techniques and fields, which could be tested and verified by an aspirant who had the faith and courage to undertake a disciplined voyage of self-discovery. Hence this approach was to be a 'self-knowledge psychology' characterised by an experiential "inner empiricism (2)".

It is against this background that Robert Ornstein in 1973 had defined psychology as

primarily the science of consciousness and reiterated that it was time to return to the primary source of psychology — the analysis of consciousness (3).

Echoing the same thoughts and in consonance with the meticulously recorded notes of his experiential journey (now available as *Record of Yoga*) which made him the pioneer of 'human science', Sri Aurobindo, in an incomplete manuscript written in 1927, gave a landmark definition of psychology that can be regarded as the forerunner of the transpersonal approach:

"Psychology is the science of consciousness and its status and operations in Nature and, if that can be glimpsed or experienced, its status and operations beyond what is known as Nature (4)".

This approach was a modification of a more simple definition he had penned during 1917-18, "Psychology is the knowledge of consciousness and its operations (5)."

There are two key-terms in the 1927 definition: 'Consciousness' and 'Nature', which need to be understood in the context of Sri Aurobindo's thought:

(a) Consciousness can be defined as a self-aware, self-manifesting, creative force of existence that is both the inmost reality of everything (perceived in this poise as 'Self' in spirituality) and the Conscious-Force (studied as 'Energy' by science) that builds and organises the worlds of matter, life and mind and therefore antedates the brain in evolution, using it as an instrument for expression. It extends beyond the mind through the subconscious into an Inconscience, full of

involved potentialities while it can also rise to a Superconscience, full of dynamic possibilities; it is therefore simultaneously integral and pluri-dimensional.

(b) Nature (known as *Prakṛti*), conceived as "power of the spirit or rather... spirit as power (6)" refers to "the outer or executive side of the Shakti or Conscious-Force which forms and moves the worlds. This outer side appears here to be mechanical, a play of forces... Behind it is the living Consciousness and Force of the Divine, the divine Shakti (7)."

It can be said of Nature, "By this power the spirit creates all things in itself, hides and discovers all itself in the form and behind the veil of its manifestation (8)."

Thus, Nature is not as mechanical and unintelligent as it appears in its external poise, but organised by an Energy or Force which arranges things according to their inner truth. As Universal Nature has been projected by the Universal Spirit to offer all material for the manifestation, "... everything in Nature corresponds to something in the Universal Soul. For instance the vital corresponds to the divine Tapas (9)." [Tapas symbolises the combusive power of the Divine *Śakti* or Consciousness-Force.]

Outwardly however, this Nature presents as a facade of limitation and division, hence it is not integral. There is a higher aspect of Nature which is referred in the definition of psychology by Sri Aurobindo as, "beyond what is known as Nature". The very fact that Sri Aurobindo describes that there is something which is "beyond what is known as nature" shows that there is a Higher Nature or Supernature as well as a lower Nature. The

Supernature refers to the Higher Reality, the Consciousness-Force aspect of *Sachchidananda*, which upholds the lower nature. It acts by unification and transcendence of limitations and is integral in outlook. The human being in ignorance is subject to the lower Nature but by spiritual evolution of consciousness can ascend to the Higher Nature or Supernature. Sri Aurobindo opined that an integral knowledge, "... has to recognise the double nature of this manifestation, — for there is the higher nature of Sachchidananda in which He (Sachchidananda) is found and the lower nature of mind, life and body in which He is veiled, — and to reconcile and unite the two in the oneness of the illumined realisation. We have not to leave them separate so that we live a sort of double life, spiritual within or above, mental and material in our active and earthly living; we have to re-view and remould the lower living in the light, force and joy of the higher reality (10)."



The lower Nature exists in the Ignorance where mind, life and Matter are linked with the ego and hence separated in consciousness from the Divine. It is in its matrix that

modern psychology constructs the structure of the personality and in yoga psychology, it is the substratum that holds in its bosom the play of the forces representing inertia (*tamas*), dynamism (*rajas*) and balance (*sattva*), which by their interplay uphold the surface personality. The Higher Nature, in the classical spiritual parlance, is accessible through ego-transcendence. Actually, it is through ego-transcendence that the status of the soul (the self) progressively shifts and with each new soul-status, there is a corresponding shift in the status of Nature or Prakriti. Thus Nature itself is a dynamic phenomenon defying fixed determinations. As the soul-status shifts to a higher and higher level of the being, Nature itself is elevated to the poise of the Higher Nature with "... a superior working, a wider consciousness, a vaster force and an intenser or larger range and joy of existence (11)."

Soul and Nature

The shifting stances of the soul-status indicates the different poises of the soul or self that preside over Nature in a complex, rich and variegated manifestation. There is:

- a. its poise of pure eternity that is superior to and governing its manifestations;
- b. the poise of self-supporting universality that develops the power of becoming, of its existence and thus manifests the "infinite in the finite"; and
- c. the poise of exclusive individuality, which pursues a particular course of the phenomenon of becoming, to appear as "mutably finite in the infinite (12)".

At the same time, the soul or spirit,..." is not irrevocably limited by any particular self-formulation in Time, but can break through and beyond it, break it up or develop it, select,

reject, new-create, reveal out of itself a greater self-formulation (13)."

"This power of the soul over its nature is of the utmost importance in the Yoga of self-perfection; if it did not exist, we could never get by conscious endeavour and aspiration out of the fixed groove of our present imperfect human being; if any greater perfection were intended, we should have to wait for Nature to effect it in her own slow or swift process of evolution. In the lower forms of being the soul accepts this complete subjection to Nature, but as it rises higher in the scale, it awakes to a sense of something in itself which can command Nature; but it is only when it arrives at self-knowledge that this free will and control becomes a complete reality (14)."



Indian spirituality has always considered that when the soul-status shifts to the higher Nature, it can be poised in different ways in which *Sachchidananda* manifests, viz. in the principle of infinite unity of self-existence; in the principle of infinite conscious energy or in the principle of infinite self-existent delight. "In these three poises the consciousness of unity dominates; the soul lives in its awareness of eternity, universality, unity, and whatever diversity there is, is not separative, but only a multitudinous aspect of oneness (15)." Sri Aurobindo has enlarged further the scope of the higher ranges of Nature to the poise where *Sachchidananda* manifests the creative power of

the Supermind, "... a luminous self-determining knowledge, will and action... (16)", coeval with perfect delight so as to be "...always aware of the Divine and free from Ignorance and its consequences (17)."

Thus, a poise in any of the three aspects of *Sachchidananda* can reflect oneness, though one or other aspect predominates but with the manifestation of the Supermind, the *Sachchidananda* experience becomes not only unitary but simultaneously integral. A poise in the higher Nature, that has transcended the ego and even experienced the *Sachchidananda*, cannot fully conquer the forces of Ignorance and Inconscience unless the powers of the Supermind are manifested. The Supermind itself has higher and lower ranges; in its higher gnosis, "... unity is the basis, but it takes its joy in diversity; in lower fact of supermind diversity is the basis, but it refers back always to a conscious unity and it takes joy in unity (18)." Sri Aurobindo reminded, "These ranges of consciousness are beyond our present level; they are superconscious to our normal mentality. That belongs to a lower hemisphere of being (19)."

The Truth of the unitary *Sachchidananda*, at the Higher Nature where Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss form an indivisible trio, gets projected in the divisive principles of mind, life-energy and matter at the lower Nature. This cleavage between the Higher Nature and lower Nature and this divisibility between the principles of mind, life-energy and matter in the lower Nature is necessary so that each individual principle develops its maximum potential at the expense of others, ensuring the variety and richness of creation. However, it should be remembered that each principle has the

potentiality to develop because the universal soul or spirit, "... dwells in all these planes in a certain simultaneity and builds upon each of these principles a world or series of worlds with its beings who live in the nature of that principle (20)."



Moreover, just as annular rings are present in a tree-trunk revealing the whole history of the tree, similarly, all the planes of the Higher Nature and lower Nature are present in the consciousness of each individual human being, giving him or her, a chance to shift from the ignorance of divisibility to the knowledge of unity. "Man, the microcosm, has all these planes in his own being, ranged from his subconscious to his superconscious existence. By a developing power of Yoga he can become aware of these concealed worlds hidden from his physical, materialised mind and senses which know only the material world, and then he becomes aware that his material existence is not a thing apart and self-existent, as the material universe in which he lives is also not a thing apart and self-existent, but is in constant relation

to the higher planes and acted on by their powers and beings. He can open up and increase the action of these higher planes in himself.... But his most important capacity is that of developing the powers of the higher principles in himself, a greater power of life, a pure light of mind, the illumination of supermind, the infinite being, consciousness and delight of spirit.... he has to begin from the law of his present imperfection, to take full account of it and see how it can be converted to the law of a possible perfection.... Mind in him, though he is an embodied mental being, has to bear the control of the body and the physical life and can only, by some more or less considerable effort of energy and concentration, consciously control life and body. It is only by increasing that control that he can move towards perfection, — and it is only by developing soul-power that he can reach it. Nature-power in him has to become more and more completely a conscious act of soul, a conscious expression of all the will and knowledge of spirit (21)."

It can thus be surmised that Sri Aurobindo visualised a consciousness-based integral psychological perspective with a whole-person orientation from the beginning. The whole-person in the Aurobindonian ambit includes the outer being and the inner being supported by the soul-principle and its field of action extends from the embodied consciousness to the transcendental consciousness, as well as expanding into the cosmic consciousness. The soul-principle itself is a projection of the Spirit in its individual poise that is identified simultaneously with the Spirit in the Transcendental and Universal poises. It is significant that the integral psychological perspective of contemporary times includes personal, interpersonal and transpersonal

dimensions — not just the transpersonal. Transpersonal psychology itself has outgrown its initial poise that was context specific to other Western schools of psychology and is moving towards the whole person by surpassing the transpersonal/trans-egoic aspect of the self.

Psychology — a complex of science and metaphysics



Metaphysics in the Aristotelian sense concerned itself with the fundamental nature of existence. Today that terrain is being claimed by fundamental physics, cognitive sciences and even evolutionary biology. The problem is that if science starts from the premise that physical matter is the only reality, its conclusions cannot be justified empirically if the scientific temper is to be impartial. Moreover, the scientific position affirms itself by denying whatever it cannot explain. Such an 'a priori denial' would be antithetical to the very spirit of knowledge. Modern physics shows that sub-atomic particles like leptons and quarks cannot be subdivided any further because they lapse into formlessness. It is as if forms lapse into something like the *Brahman* of the *Upaniṣads*, which is without form though containing all

forms and permeating all forms. The 'bottoms up' approach to build a model of reality with ultimate building-blocks appears to be no longer tenable. Ulrich Mohrhoff writes, "The right question to ask is, how does Brahman manifest the world — or manifest itself as the world (22)?"

The dilemma of modern scientific psychology is that while it has to be scientific in temper, it cannot justifiably exclude the investigation of phenomenological experience. If it has to keep its scientific character, there is no reason why it should not take cues from the fact that what quantum physics tells us about the physical world can only be appreciated on the basis of metaphysical presuppositions. Moreover, if psychology has to accommodate phenomenological experience, there is also a scope to acknowledge insights originating from deep spiritual experience. Sri Aurobindo explains that the mind cannot go on dividing existence ad infinitum, "... because behind this dividing action is the saving knowledge of the supramental which knows every whole, every atom to be only a concentration of all-force, of all-consciousness, of all-being into phenomenal forms of itself (23)."

The Supramental is the creative consciousness that not only explains atoms and molecules but also life and mind. A greater psychological paradigm has to acknowledge both the material reality and the spiritual reality. It is in the context of the complex interplay between the supramental reality and the material reality, between supermind and the mind, between the soul and Nature that Sri Aurobindo had described as early as in 1917–18:

"A complete psychology cannot be a pure natural science, but must be a compound of

science and metaphysical knowledge (24)."

He continued, "A complete psychology must be a complex of the science of mind, its operations and its relations to life and body with intuitive and experimental knowledge of the nature of mind and its relations to supermind and spirit (25)."

"A physical science is a knowledge of physical processes which leads inevitably to action and use of physical processes. The scientist may only regard scientific truth and not utility; but he can find only truth of the process of things, not truth of the nature of things. His discoveries bring about inevitably a utility for action; for all truth of process is a utility for action. Even when not the aim of science, process and utility are the soul and body of physical science. Matter itself is only a utility of Spirit or Nature for physical process and action. Material energy is an instrumental dynamis which has no other sense of its operations. We get beyond to a higher sense only when [we] get beyond material to mental, psychical and spiritual energy, to mind, soul and spirit.

"Debatable it is whether if we knew the real essence of Matter and the basic, not only the apparent, relations of mind, soul and spirit to matter and material operations, we could not arrive at an infinitely more potent use of physical process and operations. But in any case these things cannot be discovered by physical science; it has its limits and cannot exceed its limits.

"Psychology may begin as a natural science, but it deals already with supraphysical and must end in a metaphysical enquiry. If one side of the process it studies and its method of enquiry is physical; the other and more important is

non-physical; it is a direct observation of mental operations by mind without any regard to their physiological meaning, support, substratum or instrumentation (26)."

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What Resonates with You?

James Anderson

Abstract

What we resonate with is a reflection of our inner condition. We must develop and bring forward the 'inner' sides of our instrumental nature before we can resonate more truly and onto a higher frequency. With the richness of the Inner Being, residing between the Outer Being and the Soul-space, beauty will come back to us.



Look at yourself candidly and ask yourself this simple question: what do you want to embrace in your life? You can take it as a gauge of your personal evolution. Disinterestedly observe the attachments you hold with the outside world. What do you really value in life? Look at what you truly seek: it will be a perfect indicator of your inner state. It is like a mirror. Does the resonance always appear from the surface?

How frequent and sustained are those precious visitations inside? Gradually, as you look at yourself over a period of time, you will see it is all a mixture.

What we secretly search for in life will be mixed too. There is no real single-pointed aspiration. Or else, it is submerged within the debris of your nature. What you will come to understand is that every predilection is

just a factor of your consciousness. There is little consistency. What we seek to attract in our lives is only a reflection of our states of consciousness and these are always variable. We do not move forward in a straight line and our journey is prone to so many detours. However, it must be admitted that these detours too are very necessary for our growth. In the scheme of things, they serve a purpose. How else can we learn which is our best route unless we take a wrong turning now and then? Look upon these meanderings as just a part of the journey. Everything is an education.

We do this work not to change our outer circumstances and we do not do it to modify our preferences in life. All this is but a consequence. We do not yearn for superficial solutions. We do it solely to access our Truth inside. Everything is a reflection of our inner states and once we touch This Truth, once we get the tiniest glimmer of it, the whole direction of our life will start to change. We make a sublime, irrevocable choice. We choose the Infinite. Our whole being will start to vibrate to this new resonance. Everything will flow from that single knowledge.

Our nature

Our nature is not a homogenous whole; that is plain to see. Diversity will always be there, but disharmony is latently not required. We aim for harmony throughout, in all the multiplicity of our being. However, what we put out to the world is discordant and variable and this is why we encounter such disharmony in our day-to-day lives. It is just a reflection. It is because of this that we take the wrong turnings. Until our nature becomes totally purified, this situation can

only be modified and not transformed. We are emitting confused and sometimes conflicting messages, which explains why there is such a lack in our lives. We cannot truly express, because we have no single, solid basis from which to articulate. Like attracts like; we are but a mixture, so we seek resonance as a mixture. Consequently, everything we attract is but a mixture. We are offering conflicting magnets to the Universe. There is no single, steady influx coming to us. This is because we don't really know where we stand.

In truth, we are only a part of a vast Oneness and until we realise that state inside, we will never be able to appreciate this truth. For that, we have to work inside. Much effort is needed; the fruits of our *sādhana* will not be served to us on a plate. A progressive surrender will give us all the energy we need. That is our foundation. But it needs to be harnessed in practice. We need to summon all our aspiration and toss everything we don't need onto the sacrificial Fire. We can lay everything at the Mother's feet. Don't select, just be transparent and offer everything. Just offer everything you are at this present moment. Don't pick and choose. There is no sense in hiding anything, because your aim is to give every part of yourself to Her. Holding something back is a futile and insincere exercise. Don't look for 'things' to offer, just present your entire self and meet Her eyes. Can you turn yourself inside-out? This is practice and without it, we lapse into neglect and when we neglect, our instruments get tarnished. If we allow our being to get alloyed, we will find ourselves still resonating with some very unhealthy influences.



Mental resonance

We can start with the mind. It is our present determinism. We start there because the mind can become a glaring and prominent obstacle to our progress. Is your mind continually projecting from the surface, repeatedly engaging in superficialities and matters of no real consequence? Is your preoccupation habitually taking you there? If this instrument is confused and blurred, there is little prospect of addressing and aligning the lower sides of our nature. Once clarified, it can exert a helpful influence down below. At the very least, it will not stand in harm's way. It will leave a small space for the psychic influence to do its work. So, with a clear and purified mind, we are more able to proceed downwards and open everything else to

the process of purification. Stilling the mind is a very challenging process, so it is hardly surprising that most society live in a mental chaos. What it gives out and receives is largely a stew.

There are many ways to quieten the mind. The Mother often recommends just concentrating and dwelling within the heart. There is no better base than that. We can also learn, as Sri Aurobindo advocates in his *Letters on Yoga* (1), to dissociate ourselves from the "factory of thoughts". Usually, we identify with them so much they completely overwhelm us. If we find that we are not experiencing clarity and stillness outside, we have to look here first.

It helps to create a distinction within our mind. There is the "active part", which never stops churning and regurgitating meaningless thoughts. We must detach from that and start to identify with the "quiet, masterful part", which sits calmly in the background. Here, there is a sublime stillness waiting in the wings. This part is under the psychic influence. It's not so prominent and intrusive but do you have any inkling of its presence already? Look closely inside to see if you can sense it. If the seeking becomes fruitless, call the Mother and entreat Her to help you access it.

Work on separating these two parts. Ask for this serene stillness to always intervene in your life. This can be an important first step in organising and purifying the mind. If you give yourself to this part, it can realign the whole structure of your thinking process. It will start to sift through the "factory of thoughts" and do the necessary work of "observing them, judging, rejecting,

eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and change.”



Once there is a sense of greater order and quiet, you can raise the focus of your consciousness higher still, several inches above the head. Try to station your consciousness there. Concentrate on that point, but remember also to reside there in the midst of your daily activities. At unexpected moments, you may find yourself eventually reaching a peak of sublime stillness. Lay down its mirror to reflect the shining and intuitive rays from above. Experience the Light and vastness. This is the true resonance: spontaneous and totally silent. Identify with the emerging inner mind. Carry this atmosphere with you always.

Once the mind is stilled, the work can proceed further down. Perhaps everything will unfold, spontaneously in unison. There might be a sense of being carried. Effort is there of course, but alongside, the surrender begins to subtly impose itself on the being and the *sādhana* more simply unfolds. Don't seek to apply your own force, but always be conscious and stay open to the Higher Force from above. Just leave everything for the Mother to take over. A more systematic and premeditated approach may be adopted, and that is fine too. It may be a slight detour but you are generally moving in the right direction and what you resonate with is already changing.

Vital resonance

Sooner or later though, the vital has to be addressed. In my own practice, it was on this plane I felt myself called to practise first. The work here is non-stop; there often seems to be no end in sight! It is like a huge reservoir and its contents are very mixed. Is your vital swamping you with desire and repeatedly luring you with the trappings of the material world? There are so many ways one can get ensnared in its mesh. When you are in that consciousness, your frequency lowers and you hunger after things from outside. Most people live in its darker depths and some seek no justification from the mind to sanction their greed, cravings and desires. When no leverage from the mind is being applied, a recipe for psychological anarchy is unconsciously being prepared. One experiences a resonance here that will get very soiled and sticky.

It is better to not look for instant solutions. Certainly, coercion is inadvisable; a calm and patient approach should always be adopted. Try not to starve it: that is altogether a different path. Just be conscious always of its movements. Keep a distance from them. Try not to identify with them and when they impose, stay disinterested and disengage. Just observe everything that arises, 'good' or 'bad', and call and connect always with the deeper, inner Presence, whose torch light illumines, changes and eventually transforms everything it discovers. Direct its light onto every one of its movements. If one holds onto this Light, the vital starts to slowly refine and purify so that its 'inner' part, its true identity, can step forward. Identify with that. Above all, call the Peace to descend into it:

“Reject all disturbance and call in more and more peace and equality from above into the vital.

“If you get peace then to clean the vital becomes easy. If you simply clean and clean and do nothing else, you go very slowly — for the vital gets dirty again and has to be cleaned a hundred times. The peace is something that is clean in itself — so to get it is a positive way of securing your object. To look for dirt only and clean is the negative way (2).”



The body's resonance

Our being is made of many elements and much of us represents a construction of the Inconscience. There is a physical consciousness in us, which is inert, heavy and dull. Do you find yourself resonating from that side of your nature from time to time? Everything outside us becomes lethargic and seemingly as lifeless as lead. When we start identifying with this side of our consciousness, what obscures us comes back to us with the same vehemence from the outside world. This situation often happens when the animating vital has gone on strike or into a state of retreat. The body has to rely on its own resources and there is no saving grace.

Even in *sādhanā*, the physical can sometimes

impose its *tamasic* rule over the rest of the being. Presently, we live saturated by higher forces. They are our true lifeline but are we equipped to fully embrace them? No matter how much we endeavour to open to these forces, particularly with the body, there is opposition. With the physical consciousness, there is a dull resistance and recoil which often rises up, because it can no longer bear the sublime downpour from above.

This is one reason why Sri Aurobindo referred to depression in such circumstances as a “psychological necessity”. It is not really a matter of individual shortcoming but a fact of life (at least in its present form). Under the pressure of these Forces, all the silt that had been accumulating over the years in the physical consciousness lifts itself up to cloud our emotional states into a sense of melancholy or “greyness”.

Surely, we don't aspire to resonate with this. We have to work on our body too in Integral Yoga. It is a unique part of the tapestry of its practice:

“The physical sadhana is to bring down the higher light and power and peace and Ananda into the body consciousness, to get rid of the inertia of the physical, the doubts, limitations, external tendency of the physical mind, the defective energies of the vital physical (nerves) and bring in instead the true consciousness there so that the physical may be a perfect instrument for the Divine Will (3).”

Our body consciousness secretly craves this transmutation. The part that craves it is more subtle than its gross counterpart. In spite of that, we have to apply an outer

approach of methodical exercise and activity to galvanise, chisel and discipline it into becoming a more robust and plastic instrument. Meanwhile, we can systematically infuse its consciousness with the divine Light and Force from above.

We work on subtilising the body and infusing its cells with the very Force of the Mother. It is necessary preparatory work for transformation. Again, as with the mind and vital, our path is to bring this 'inner' part, this more subtle body, forward. It is a progressive development. The Inner Being yearns for this progress. It is waiting to step forward. Once installed, unimaginable beauty will shine on us from outside. Once we start to live in it, we will

surely find that we resonate with the Light that we truly are.

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Preparing and Opening the Being to the Higher Force

Dr. Monica Gulati

Abstract

For a long period of time, we try to find temporary resolutions and harmonies in our life, through the tool of a half-lit ordinary mind and reason. And it does serve a purpose to our growth and understanding. But after we have been long enough in the domain of this logical-analytical mind, and after we have tried at infinite instances to find resolutions, no matter how decent or worthy, on the same level, something still feels limited, and amiss. It seems like that is the time when one can rise above the conceptual, dualistic mind, and access the calm, peace and higher Force of Consciousness above the mind. It is at such a stage that an aspiration from below rises upwards and stations the consciousness above the physical mind which is still stable, like an open, ready receptacle.



Readiness to go upwards and higher

For a very long time in our life, we make obsessive use of the limited ordinary consciousness, which through its narrow window, tries to search for resolutions, answers and harmonies in life and within. Everything has a proper place in this long, often arduous journey, and so has the ordinary

narrow way of understanding. When it is all dark, one cherishes whatever little torch light (no matter how flickering) that sheds light on the path. And so we preserve and keep safe, our bondage of looking at the world and ourselves through the ordinary consciousness, always dependent on sense perceptions and their limited conditioned interpretations. And we serve ourselves for

a long time like that.

But more often, we very rigidly stick to our own worldviews and perceptions and clash with others, which may seem opposing in appearance. We are so stuck in our thoughts, opinions, and ways of thinking, until there comes a point when we see how limited and distorted those ways are and then we feel an aspiration to go beyond the limited perceptions, which now don't appear useful, but suffocating. And if this flame of aspiration lingers and burns long enough, the being is ready to make an ascent further, so as to give space to a greater Knowing and a mightier Force from above to descend.

Preparation of an empty, steady container

We find a detailed account with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, of this uplifting of the station of consciousness and the rising-up of aspiration and waiting in perseverance, still and steady, like an open solid receptacle, empty of itself, for the higher Force to dawn upon.



For this purpose, Sri Aurobindo talks about concentrating above the head. And if a true transformation has to happen, this phase of rising above the ordinary dualistic brain-lodged mind is necessary for the descent of

the higher Force to happen, and hence begin the transformation of all the lower parts of the being. It is like an aspiration or thirst of a barren dry land towards the sky, which leads ultimately to the descent from above in the form of drops of rain, which go and seep down into each part and particle of the dry parched land, hence completely transforming it and making it fertile, and making all the seeds in there sprout, and blossom forth into splendour and abundance.

“The power of concentration above the head is to bring peace, silence, liberation from the body sense, the identification with mind and life and open the way for the lower (mental-vital-physical) consciousness to rise up to meet the higher Consciousness above and for the powers of the higher (spiritual or divine) Consciousness to descend into mind, life and body. This is what is called in this Yoga the spiritual transformation (1).”

For the new to take place, the old has to give way; emptying the mind and being of its older ways of thinking, feeling and acting, is imperative. One believes no more in one's older patterns of thinking-feeling-acting, and is relatively empty of the old stuff; one doesn't fuel the non-beneficial older ways. And this emptiness is a part of the process, paving the way for the newer to take space. Only when I am empty and ready to receive can I allow the new to unfold.

“Emptiness usually comes as a clearance of the consciousness or some part of it. The consciousness or part becomes like an empty cup into which something new can be poured. The highest emptiness is the pure existence of the Self in which all manifestation can take place (2).”

“The voidness (if by that you mean silence and emptiness of thoughts, movements etc.) is the basic condition into which the higher consciousness can flow (3).”

One common struggle with virtually all of us is the weakness of the container and habituated grooves of older tendencies and patterns. We are unable to sustain this emptiness, unable to bear it in immobility and become solid in it. We find ourselves resorting to our older slippery slopes in order to fill up the empty space, and hence obstruct the way of new consciousness. Therefore, it is a part of the *sādhana* to gain stability and poise in containing the emptiness, and becoming more and more a solid immovable receptacle within.



“The emptiness that you described in your letter yesterday was not a bad thing — it is this emptiness inward and outward that often in Yoga becomes the first step towards a new consciousness. Man’s nature is like a cup of dirty water — the water has to be thrown out, the cup left clean and empty for the divine liquor to be poured into it. The difficulty is that the human physical consciousness feels it difficult to bear this emptiness — it is accustomed to be occupied by all sorts of little mental and vital movements which keep it interested and amused or even if in trouble and sorrow still

active. The cessation of these things is hard to bear for it. It begins to feel dull and restless and eager for the old interests and movements. But by this restlessness it disturbs the quietude and brings back the things that had been thrown out. It is this that is creating the difficulty and the obstruction for the moment. If you can accept emptiness as a passage to the true consciousness and true movements, then it will be easier to get rid of the obstacle (4).”

The spontaneous experience of emptiness on this path indicates that one has lived long enough in the dualistic, narrow and limited ordinary consciousness, and one is ready now to transcend and go beyond. And the very fact of that emptiness is one’s experience, an indication of the already acting Divine Force. Sri Aurobindo also talks about a persevering quality in ‘real emptiness.’ Like, there is no hurry to go anywhere, just the silent and immobile, steady waiting is enough. He says, “If it is real emptiness, one can last in it for years together, — it is because the vital is restless and full of desires (not empty) that it is like that [difficult to remain empty]. Also the physical mind is by no means at rest. If the desires were thrown out and the ego less active and the physical mind at rest, knowledge would come from above; in place of the physical mind’s stupidities, the vital mind could be calm and quiet and the Mother’s Force take up the action and the higher consciousness begin to come down. That is the proper sequel of emptiness. But nothing of this has happened because the “emptiness” could not complete itself, that is to say, the true silence and peace (5).”

It may appear that once emptiness is experienced, it just settles down automatically. But that is not the case. One has to constantly keep clearing, cultivate keeping the being pure, empty, and rejecting all the lower,

older movements that show up from time to time in order to have their chance, as a matter of habit.

“There is a certain truth in what you say about the empty cup — a certain emptying of the consciousness of old things is necessary before anything positive can settle itself. It is what is happening in your physical consciousness, the old movements are being emptied out and you fall quiet, but they press in again and the cup has to be repeatedly emptied. If there is a firm and persistent rejection, then this repeated return of these old movements will cease to be so persistent; the periods of quiet and its intensity will increase until the peace and quietude can be established and permanent (6).”



It is the vital in us that doesn't cherish this emptiness in the beginning, and wants to just fill up the space with older patterns and activities, for because of older habitual patterns it finds the emptiness a bit dull and boring.

“Silence of the being is the first natural aim

of the Yoga. You and some others do not find satisfaction in it because you have not overcome the vital mind which wants always some kind of activity, change, doing something, making something happen. The eternal immobility of the silent Brahman is a thing it does not relish. So when emptiness comes, it finds it dull, inert, monotonous (7).”

“The physical does not get tired of the blankness. It may feel tamasic because of its own tendency to inertia, but it does not usually object to voidness. Of course it may be the vital physical — you have only to reject it as a remnant of the old movements (8).”

Keeping oneself still and steady, like an open receptacle, ever persevering, ready to receive, is a necessary cultivation to develop. Now we have a lifetime of employment, but whether we are standing in a queue, waiting, or walking, driving, or anything, we can spend some time consciously to be open to the higher force, to be still and steady and always receptive.

“When you feel empty like that, you have only to remain very still and open yourself to receive the Light and Force. Emptiness is a bad condition only when it is dull or when you receive into it wrong movements. But often one has to be empty in order to receive what is to be given (9).”

This state of a disinterested quietude is an important movement in *sādhana*, when it is relatively easier now to have concentration, because of loss of interest in outer ordinary movements. In fact it becomes an aid in concentration above the head or at any other centre, when there is a relatively good degree of purification in the being. And purification in understanding also, in that one knows that

nothing can be added or subtracted in our true beingness, and that worldly wants and losses are nothing in front of what we have to realise.

“In itself this emptiness and quietude, free from all anxiety or trouble or thought about people or things is not a bad sign or an undesirable state. It is a state of what the Yogis call *udāsīnatā*, a separateness from all things and indifference, an untroubled neutral quietude. In many Yogas it is considered a very advanced and desirable condition — a state of liberation from the world, though not yet of realisation of the Divine, — but they consider it a necessary passage to the realisation. In our Yoga it is only a passage through which one arrives at a more positive spiritual calm consciousness in which all experiences and all realisations become possible. The feeling of dullness is due probably not to this state which is in itself a condition of ease and release, but to the depressed condition of the bodily health and strength. That also is probably the cause why the more positive state does not come quickly. The forgetfulness you speak of comes sometimes in the period of change, but passes away afterwards; a new force of memory comes (10).”

Descent from above

So as one is keeping the container empty, still, steady and ready, in time the descent may begin to happen. The Mother talks about keeping an aspiration steady and soaring upwards and waiting as if in front of a hard lid, but still trying to pierce through it with steadiness and conviction (11).

At another place She advises us to rise above the ordinary thinking mind, placing our attention above the head, like a mirror

facing upwards, and keeping the mirror still, quiet and steady (12). It is imperative that concentrating above the head and stationing the consciousness there, as much as possible, is an integral part of this upliftment. Sri Aurobindo elaborates in his *Letters on Yoga III* that one must even begin to think and speak from above the head, keeping the concentration still and steady.

Talking about the fundamental realisations in this yoga, Sri Aurobindo states:

- “1. The psychic change so that a complete devotion can be the main motive of the heart and the ruler of thought, life and action in constant union with the Mother and in her Presence.
2. The descent of the Peace, Power, Light etc. of the Higher Consciousness through the head and heart into the whole being, occupying the very cells of the body.
3. The perception of the One and Divine infinitely everywhere, the Mother everywhere and living in that infinite consciousness (13).”



Keeping the mind quiet, still and open

As one becomes gradually sure of the futility of remaining immersed in or engaging with the thought/feeling stream, one can experience a relative quietude and peace in the mind. And even when ripples of thoughts

may be there, if one consciously chooses to ignore them, not to get involved in them actively, it leads to the maintenance of an empty and relatively quiet state of mind, even if not yet thought-free.

“To quiet the mind in such a way that no thoughts will come is not easy and usually takes time. The most necessary thing is to feel a quietude in the mind so that if thoughts come they do not disturb or hold the mind or make it follow them, but simply cross and pass away. The mind first becomes the witness of the passage of thought and not the thinker, afterwards it is able not to watch the thoughts but lets them pass unnoticed and concentrates in itself or on the object it chooses without trouble.

“There are two main things to be secured as the foundations of sadhana — the opening of the concentration on the Mother and self-offering to her are the direct way. The growth of Bhakti which you feel is the first sign of the psychic development. A sense of the Mother’s presence or force or the remembrance of her supporting and strengthening you is the next sign. Eventually, the soul within begins to be active in aspiration and psychic perception guiding the mind to the right thoughts, the vital to the right movements and feelings, showing and rejecting all that has to be put away and turning the whole being in all its movements to the Divine alone. For the self-realisation, peace and silence of the mind are the first condition. Afterwards one begins to feel release, freedom, wideness, to live in a consciousness silent, tranquil, untouched by any or all things, existing everywhere and in all, one with or united with the Divine. Other experiences come on the way, or may come, such as the opening of the inner vision, the

sense of the Force working within and various movements and phenomena of the working etc. One may also be conscious of ascents of the consciousness and descents of Force, Peace, Bliss or Light from above (14).”

As one rises above the body consciousness, one becomes aware of something beyond and above, which is a movement in *sādhanā*, as Sri Aurobindo states:

“What you felt as a part of you, yourself but not your physical self, rising to meet the higher consciousness above, was this inner being; it was your (inner) higher vital being which rose in that way to join the highest Self above — and it was able to do so, because the work of purifying the outer vital nature had begun in earnest. Each time there is a purification of the outer nature, it becomes more possible for the inner being to reveal itself, to become free and to open to the higher consciousness above.

“When this happens, several other things can happen at the same time. First, one becomes aware of the silent Self above — free, wide, without limits, pure, untroubled by the mental, vital and physical movements, empty of ego and limited personality, — this is what you have described in your letter. Secondly, the Divine Power descends through this silence and freedom of the Self and begins to work in the Adhara. This is what you felt as a pressure; its coming through the top of the head, the forehead and eyes and nose meant that it was working to open the mental centres — especially the two higher centres of thought and will and vision in the inner mental being. These two centres are called the thousand-petalled lotus and the *jñāna-cakra* between the eyebrows. Thirdly, by this working the inner parts of the being are opened and freed; you are liberated

from the limitations of the ordinary personal mind, vital and physical and become aware of a wider consciousness in which you can be more capable of the needed transformation. But that is necessarily a matter of time and long working and you are only taking the first steps in this way (15)."

Continuing the long journey



As we begin to become aware of ourselves as not just the limited person that we think we are, we can see that there is no end as if, to the letting go, knowings and the realisations, and we can keep opening further and further to the wideness and vastness of our infinite True being. This journey of self-realisation or self-exploration is indeed an adventurous one, which opens us up to true Delight, independent of the little wants and willings of our ordinary life.

We can open ourselves to a life that can be lived in openness, vastness, receptivity, plasticity, force, love and light. This, it seems, is the best social service we can do for our own self and other beings and gives perhaps the best possible meaning to this precious human life.

Let us conclude then this little initiation and invocation with the uplifting words of Sri Aurobindo:

"...That is why in this Yoga we insist always on an "opening" — an opening inwards of the inner mind, vital, physical to the inmost part of us, the psychic, and an opening upwards to what is above the mind — as indispensable for the fruits of the sadhana.

"The underlying reason for this is that this little mind, vital and body which we call ourselves is only a surface movement and not our 'self' at all. It is an external bit of personality put forward for one brief life and for the play of the Ignorance. It is equipped with an ignorant mind stumbling about in search of fragments of truth, an ignorant vital rushing about in search of fragments of pleasure, an obscure and mostly subconscious physical receiving the impacts of things and suffering rather than possessing a resultant pain or pleasure. All that is accepted until the mind gets disgusted and starts looking about for the real Truth of itself and things, the vital gets disgusted and begins wondering whether there is not such a thing as real bliss and the physical gets tired and wants liberation from itself and its pains and pleasures. Then it is possible for this little ignorant bit of surface personality to get back to its real Self and with it to these greater things — or else to extinction of itself, Nirvana. The real Self is not anywhere on the surface but deep within and above. Within is the soul supporting an inner mind, inner vital, inner physical in which there is a capacity for universal wideness and with it for the things now asked for, — direct contact with the Truth of self and things, taste of a universal bliss, liberation from the imprisoned smallness and sufferings of the gross physical body (16)."

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Surrender Each Moment

Arul Dev

Abstract

Love and only Love, above all, has the capacity to surrender. Even human love which is conditional can accelerate and release all the bonds of our littleness. The aim of surrender is a love for the Divine, an aspiration to unite with the Divine and to find Delight in the Divine doing the *sādhanā* within us and through us in the world. It is a dynamic path where we wholeheartedly engage with for the entirety of our life, work and relationships and offer it all to our beloved Divine. We deeply aspire for the Divine to be very 'near us', in each moment. We deeply aspire that the Divine graces Their presence and qualities in us and others, within our works and in the world.



This article explores a few quotes from the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. From these inspirations, we shall glean insights and explore the practices to cling to for the aspiration to surrender and wait to receive the incoming Grace. The widening of consciousness is an outcome of surrender. Surrendering is ultimately about receiving New life, light, love and substance

from the Divine Supreme directly within all parts of our body and being.

Aim

We begin this exploration with a reflection — to what aim and to whom do we offer our surrender? We need to consciously make the highest aim of our life absolute and clear.

Surrender is a process where the human being aspires to link with the Divine, experience union and through that aspires for a divine body and divine life. If we make this choice of divine life, we need to learn to cling to that. We need to free ourselves from constantly clinging to our small desires and ambitions and eventually allow these desires to merge with our highest aim and become fit instruments to fulfil That.

Surrender is the epitome of joy. We aspire to experience this Delight. A constant surrender (initially with some mental effort/moulding the will and later absolutely spontaneous as a natural response of our whole system) has the power to unite the surrenderer with the surrendered. This is the potential of our exploration and in this article let us take some baby steps in an experiential way.



The aim of this article is to explore living with the practice of surrender in each moment. This would include at least four aspects. First, is to connect to our Divine Supreme in some way which comes naturally to us or is graced to us. Second, is to offer all the limiting states or less than divine Qualities that are passing through our mind, emotions, sensations and body, to the Divine Supreme. Third, is to stay with this aspiration to surrender in a conscious, living way and wait for the Grace to inflow into us. Fourth, is the joy of receiving the New vibrations of Love, Light,

Power, Harmony, Beauty and Substance within us and which slowly flows into our outer relationships, activities and works.

Surrendering our breath practice

Let us practise surrendering and receiving the new life-forces within our breath. Either in a sitting, walking or any normal posture, bring your awareness to your body overall — at the surface and within the body. Remember to include the front, back and sides of your body. Now slowly become aware of the movement of breath in each part of your body. You can even bring your awareness from head to toe and wait to see how the breath is moving in each part. Is it a free flow or is it being held/stuck in some parts? Is it a full breathing or a partial breathing that is going on?

In its natural state, the body does not hold its breath and lets it out in its own time. Only that allows our body to receive the next dose of *prāna*, deepening the connection with *Mahaprāna* (universe). So in each part of your body detect where breath is being held back, not released fully or is in a partial flow state. Surrender or offer this part and what it is holding to the Divine and wait till your breath flows fully and is released fully too. Surrender your breath to the Universe or Divine Supreme. Wait and see how your body feels and whether qualities like calmness, peace, stillness, joy or light are received or infilled within your body.

This practice of surrender bestows us slowly with equality in our being. In pain or pleasure, win or lose, pleasant or unpleasant and in all such experiences of dualities, surrender can help retain the joy of an equanimous posture.

You can do this practice on your own or in small groups where the experience for each could be more tangible and palpable, as all are paying attention to the same practice.



Negation of surrender

Let us begin a deeper reflection through this quote by the Mother:

“You see, the mass is still under the great rule of Nature. I am referring to mental humanity, predominantly mental, which developed the mind but misused it and immediately set out on the wrong path — first thing.

“There is nothing to say since the first thing done by the divine forces which emanated for the Creation was to take the wrong path!’ That is the origin, the seed of this marvelous spirit of independence — the negation of surrender, in other words. Man said, ‘I have the power to think; I will do with it what I want, and no one has the right to intervene. I am free, I am an independent being, IN- DE- PEN- DENT! So that’s how things stand: we are all independent beings (1)!”

How many seconds in a day are we consciously in a state of surrender? Do we actually remember to offer our inner experiences,

aspirations, desires, outer pursuits, relationships, works and so on to the Divine and its Creative Force? Very few of us remember to do the sadhana of offering in real time. Very few of us, in the moment when a fear grips us, a depression sucks us, a doubt stirs, or emotional memories surge, actually become aware of these states and offer them to the Divine, to be taken up for transformation.

While doing the *sādhana* of surrender, how close do we feel the Divine within, above, below or around us? Who do we feel is doing this *sādhana*? What are we aware of primarily — our experiences or the divine Presence? For most of us, we will feel a sense of our individual self, the ‘I’ doing something with a surrendered poise to touch the Divine. This still is a part of the negation of surrender, even mentally if we remind ourselves that as sincere children of the Divine Mother we need to do our effort and aspire. Yet it is the Divine Mother who is primarily doing the *sādhana* in us, according to each of our capacities. She brings us to the greater depths that we don’t have direct access to. Even if we take surrender as a faith, bringing in the aspect of love to remind us that it is the Divine who is actually doing the practice in us, we can swing more to the side of absolute trust in the sacredness of surrender. Though the Divine Mother does not need our will and can anyway act and mould us, surrender makes the process more harmonious, joyful and conscious.

It is love that will help us to expand and widen our consciousness, to feel the Divine and aspire to connect to the Divine. It is love that will help us to aspire to go beyond what we are holding now, to wish that we embody

more of the Divine within us. Then our eyes can see more clearly and our deeper hearts can guide us more directly.

We then see that the challenges in our life are arranged for us. The support and solutions for the same are also arranged for us. We need to make our choice — to not get entangled and offer the challenges to the Divine. We need to wait till we receive the solution and new states. We need to connect to the Divine and remember that She is doing the work in us. First, this is a mental belief and slowly we can feel the presence of the Divine and the changes naturally unfolding within us. Then we slowly discover that what we do as our *sādhanā* is just a way to bring us to a state of aspiration and sincerity. Things evolve by a greater Hand at play. We slowly aspire to cling to the will to surrender, so that we can be open to the continued inflow of the Divine moulding us.

Practising surrender with the body as a base

Surrender is practised at all times and with all parts of our body. It becomes tangible when done during physical exercises like *yoga āsanās* along with inner bodywork. So we shall explore surrendering while doing something concrete like a physical *yoga āsana*, and then we shall take our exploration of surrender into its other aspects.

Here is an example of how we can bring a *yoga āsana* practice, inner bodywork and surrender together. One way this practice can be done is hinted here. You can explore this while doing your yoga routine or any other physical workout.

While you are doing the yoga exercises, integrate it with your bodywork. Be fully aware of your body on the surface and depth. Be with your breath. With each movement touch your body inwardly with your awareness and senses. Any tightness, stiffness or old patterns connect the body to the space or consciousness above your head, sacredness below the core of the earth or the deeper presence within the cave of your heart. Surrender your body to the higher consciousness and wait till the body gains new capacities, becomes more fluid, develops strength and gains greater flexibility.

We share some examples of how you can do this practice. Once you get the hang of it, you can apply this bodywork and surrender, for the entire duration of all your physical body workouts.

During any *yoga āsana* be aware of your body and its sensations. Connect to the substance of your body — the matter or more solid part of your body's flesh, muscles, bones and organs.

- Slowly learn to do the *yoga āsana* by staying in touch with the substance of your body. Whatever stiffness and limitations you experience in the body, offer it to the Divine. You must also remember that there is Divine in matter and offer the challenge to the belief of pure substance in the depth of your body. Surrender and wait. Aspire that the body releases its limitations and resumes its natural flow, flexibility and strength states.
- While doing any *yoga āsana* or physical exercise, connect to the cave of your heart. During each interval or tiny break in your

practice, dive deep down and reconnect to the cave of your heart. Allow qualities of eternal love, faith, light, silence, peace and joy to emerge within the cave of your heart. Surrender to these higher qualities. Wait and aspire that they flow into all the cells of your body.

- While doing any breath practice, like alternate nostril breathing, or at the end of the practice, connect to the Vastness above and around. You can connect parts of your body or being to the vastness as you do the breath practice. For example, while in practice, you can connect to the vastness behind the head and the back. Aspire to become aware of the constant support and protection of the divine Supreme ever-present at the back too, guarding forever. Then with each inhalation, let the awareness expand at the back, connecting to the Supreme Presence and with each exhalation connect to the vastness in the front. At the end, connect to the Supreme Divine's presence enveloping the whole body, the whole being and existence.
- In backward bends, our *Anāhata cakra* (heart centre) is exposed to the vastness/energy or Source descending from above. It is not so much about effort. We become aware of our body bending and our heart open to the Supreme above and we simply surrender and wait for new Inflow of nourishing qualities. This practice will help those who have insecurity and fear issues, as they are learning to sense that unseen support. For example, through backward bends in *āsanas*, psychologically one is working on fears, trust issues, insecurities, etc. With increasing faith, trust and surrender one can lean back, relax one's limitations

and drop oneself back, more and more effortlessly.

These examples are indicative of how you can do the practice on your own, integrating physical exercises, inner body workout and the surrender poise. Slowly we can allow the Vastness to spread behind, in front and all around us. We can allow it to extend into the unknown terrains once walked, evolving through many births. We can surrender all of this to transform and integrate with the present moment consciousness of the concrete presence of the Supreme.

Surrender: a *mantra* of Love



It is from love and with love that we can do the surrender. Without love it is just a dry routine. Let us read these lines from the Mother on Rādhā's prayer. May our body and being grasp the inner practice beneath this and may we aspire to do this practice sincerely through our days and nights.

"To complete what I told you yesterday about Radha's dance I have noted this down as an indication of the thought and feeling Radha must have within her when she stands at the end in front of Krishna:

'Every thought of my mind, every emotion of

my heart, every movement of my being, every feeling and every sensation, each cell of my body, each drop of my blood, all, all is yours, yours absolutely yours without reserve. You can decide my life or my death, my happiness or my sorrow, my pleasure or my pain; whatever you do with me, whatever comes to me from you will lead me to the Divine Rapture (2).”



This practice translates as this:

- Either individually or with someone else who is doing this *sādhanā* together with you connect to the Divine Supreme through the Universal Mother or Lord. You can also connect to any Master of your resonance as all are linked to the One Divine Supreme Mother or Lord.
- Stay in touch with the Divine through each activity of yours, clinging on to the aspiration to surrender.
- Take your individual efforts. Do your own *sādhanā* to make progress and let go within to receive the Divine’s response.
- Offer your inner life and reactions to the Divine. Offer your outer works to the Divine.
- Simply wait for the Divine to make of you, your life and work as the Divine pleases. This is surrender in the path of *Bhakti* and

Karma Yoga. We have been guided in Integral Yoga that before we begin anything or any work we should call on the Force of the Divine. That is all that is needed. Once we call the force we open ourselves as per the Rādhā’s prayer provided earlier. We can say for example the prayer:

“Om Sri Aurobindo Mira
 Open my mind, my heart, my life
 To your light, your love, your power.
 In all things may I see the Divine (3).”
 If this is how we call the Force, aspire and request it to work through us, then automatically even the sense of ‘I’ am working or ‘I’ am doing is not there or slowly it is dissolved. Calling, inviting and invoking the Force and letting that Force work through us is surrender. Then surrender becomes natural after a point.

Surrender to the Supreme

Let us now turn our vision to *Savitri* of Sri Aurobindo, to draw some clues on our exploration:

“For still the human limits the divine:
 Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight,
 Breathe her divine illimitable air,
 Her simple vast supremacy confess,
 Dare to surrender to her absolute.
 Then the Unmanifest reflects his form
 In the still mind as in a living glass;
 The timeless Ray descends into our hearts
 And we are rapt into eternity (4).”

If we take the middle line as our golden key or practice — “Dare to surrender to her absolute”, we would be able to understand and appreciate this process of surrender at a subtle level. Here we understand the full



dynamic posture of surrender. What we open ourselves to through surrender, infills us. So if we connect our body, mind, vital and our works and offer them to the Divine, the highest qualities of the Divine will fill inside us.

We can aspire to do this as a practice, through the day and when parts of our night can become conscious too. While it is one posture, attitude or action, for the sake of our clarity let us examine this surrender practice as a few steps:

1. We become aware of portions or parts of our thoughts, emotions, sensations and body, that limits the Divine's qualities and expressions. This has a dual posture. We are aware of ourselves and our nourishing or limiting states. We are aware experientially of at least some of the divine qualities like Light, Peace, Silence, Harmony, Love, Power, Union, Delight and Joy. It is by holding these two postures that we know in our experience that what is flowing through us, limits the Divine. This posture of surrender is a dual posture that bridges the human with the Divine. Our awareness is placed within the limiting part of body, sensation, emotion or thought. Also we are either connected to or calling or keeping our awareness present with or within the

Divine or any of their qualities.

2. We bring in an element of choice now. This is a choice to evolve to leap and embrace divine qualities within the functions of our human existence — our thinking, feeling, emotions and body, and also to express it out through our actions and works.
3. We do our own healing, inner work or practice to correct our limitations, tune our strengths and learn new ways of existing and expressing.
4. We aspire to remember to surrender. For this we need to fully and internally believe in the importance and magnificence of this practice. This quote from the Mother points the full significance of this process:

“What Sri Aurobindo called the true ‘surrender,’ the surrender to the Supreme, is a truth higher than that of relying solely upon oneself (5).”
5. This surrender needs to be conscious. This would mean that there needs an aspiration, or a silent word or intent that says or feels something like ‘*Svāha* or Surrendering’. This posture needs to be invoked experientially, else it is just something mechanical. Each time we need to say inwardly, feel or simply aspire that the thought-emotion-sensation-body is offered to the Divine and their qualities.
6. Now the key part of surrender is to learn to wait. Let us take the second-last line from the above *Savitri* quotation to glean an insight. “The timeless Ray descends into our hearts”. So if we connect a limiting or partially developed portion of our thought-emotion-feeling-body to

the Divine, then we need to wait till a Divine quality descends or enters within the thought-feeling-emotion body, and they start functioning at a higher level of consciousness.

This is how the fullness of the surrender practice feels. This whole thing is to be done in the moment when the thought, emotion, feeling, sensation and body experience is beginning to unfold.

Clinging to the will to surrender

The process of surrender may sound delightful to read. However, in real-time practice, we go back to the question with which we started the article. How many seconds in a day and night are we actually able to consciously surrender? Can we first look at our will? Can we connect to our navel region and sense if there is sufficient will and power in the first place? Is our will open? How can we intensify our will-force? Then can we reflect if we are consciously willing? Do we have a conscious will to surrender our every action, thought and behaviour to the Divine? May our reflection intensify our calm aspiration to will and surrender every moment.



Let us absorb an insight by the Mother:

“Meanwhile, we should acknowledge that we don’t have the key, it is not yet in our

hands. Or rather, we know quite well where it is, and there is only one thing to do: the perfect ‘surrender’ Sri Aurobindo speaks of, the total surrender to the divine Will whatever happens, even in the dark of night.

“There is night and sun, night and sun, and night again, many nights, but one must cling to this will for ‘surrender,’ cling as through a storm, and put everything into the hands of the Supreme Lord. Until the day when the Sun shall shine forever, the day of total Victory (6).”

So we have at least three concrete clues in our practice of surrender:

1. Practise the full posture of surrender as we have explored — Awareness, Conscious Choice, Connect to the Divine, Offer and Wait.
2. Consciously develop and strengthen our will to surrender.
3. Cling on to this will to surrender during both our joyful and challenging moments in life and work.

To be able to do this practice in the moment, we need to make this surrender practice very simple and direct and then repeat it a million times each day. To reiterate this practice, we get a clue from *Mother’s Agenda* on how the cells of Her body practise the surrender:

“So the first sound of my mantra is the call to that, the evocation. With the second sound, the body’s cells make their ‘surrender,’ they give themselves. And with the third sound comes the identification of this [the body] with That, which produces the divine life. These are my three sounds (7).”

Let us take an example to apply the insight from the above quote. Let us say that someone says something critical towards us, without understanding us fully. The next second, we notice irritation coming in, our listening reduces, we move into some emotions or memories. Often we succumb to these reactions. We do not bring a clear and firm choice. Our inner will is weak. Our will to progress and evolve needs to be lit all the time. If we really are able to do this, the tell-tale sign will be that there will be a calm will from us saying, 'No. It is not the job of my body to bear the weight of this. These reactions can be offered to the Divine and we can wait for the Divine to transform them'. So instead of tossing around inwardly with repetitive thoughts that replay the criticism, or feelings and emotions that churn, we become aware of them and open or offer them to the Divine. We wait. Instead of identifying more with the churns, we identify more with the Divine. We wait till we have Divine-touched thoughts, feelings and emotions incubating within us. This is an understanding of total surrender that is emerging now. With this we can act in the world to create something deeper and higher.

The key once again is to learn to wait and allow the transformation to be done, once we have called and offered ourselves fully to the Divine Force. We are reminded of this from the following lines by the Mother:

"But if they open themselves, if they give themselves over in an integral surrender, the work can be done for them — they have only to let it be done (8)."



Total surrender with joy

As we deepen in our sincerity and the Grace of surrender, we would start experiencing the increase in the joy of surrender, the abolition of fear overall, a vaster equanimity and greater aspiration for the Divine Manifestation on earth.

This practice of surrender needs to be dynamic and filled with joy or delight. If it is dry or mechanical, it will not be total. Here is an example of the Mother's poise and through contagion how Durga surrenders to the Supreme. And perhaps there is a clue in the last sentence that it is through bliss that she made her surrender.

"And that's why.... How many times Durga came! She would always come, and I had my eye on her (!), because in her presence I could clearly sense that there wasn't that rapport with the Supreme (she just didn't need it, she didn't need anything). And it wasn't that something acted on her consciously, deliberately, to obtain that result: it has been a contagion. I remember how she used to come, and my aspiration would be so intense, my inner attitude so concentrated ... and one day there was such a sense of power, of immensity, of ineffable bliss in the contact with the Supreme (it was a day when Durga

was there), and she seemed to be taken and absorbed in it. And through that bliss she made her surrender (9)."

So we can remember to check if there is joy present in our practice. And if not, to aspire that we feel the joy in the Divine union and wait for the Divine to do the *sāadhanā* in us, within us and through us.

Also it is good to practise surrendering to the Divine Supreme directly. In the beginning, if we are surrendering to one of their forms of a god or goddess, it is fairly important that we make an aspiration that the god or goddess stays connected to the Supreme. Many in *sāadhanā* often are vigilant about the intrusion of adverse forces, ill-wills of others and the like. To glean some insights on this, let us examine a quote by the Mother:

"And while I was walking, Durga was there — really, it was beautiful! Durga, with that awesome power of hers, forever bringing the adverse forces to heel — and she surrendered to the Supreme, to the point of no longer even recognising the adverse forces: ALL is the Supreme. It was like a widening of her consciousness. (10)."

As per this quotation, our surrender is still not complete when we are experiencing or are in fear of these small forces. We can bring in some sincerity and love for the Divine Supreme who is toiling within us for our evolution. Let us aspire to make our surrender so full and complete with the Divine Supreme, that in our experience we feel the ALL as the Supreme. We are all the time serving the Supreme through our offerings, allowing the fullness of qualities to come through. It is the human who can

do this surrender to the Supreme Divine the most, as the Divine Presence is within — in the heart and in every cell of the body.

In this way, all the opposites and downfalls that exist in us and in the world are our raw-material to offer to the Supreme Divine so that She may manifest her full Grace and Love within us and in the world. Absolute surrender bestows equanimity in each level of our being. This is such a vast equality towards each so-called high and low of life that there is no sense of pain or pleasure, less or more, near or far, pleasant or unpleasant, etc. Everything is accepted as just perfect for that moment. Everything is aspired to be offered to the Supreme Divine for Their full Presence to manifest on earth.

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Book Review

Our Divine Destiny

Selections from the Words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Compiled by: Dr. A. S. Dalal

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Dr. Dalal has done an excellent job in compiling from the vast treasure-house of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings, a sort of anthology on the divine destiny of the human collectivity in the perspective of a spiritual evolution of consciousness, that complements the scientific theory of evolution which lays emphasis on the species and their outer material forms. In contrast, the emphasis here is on the inner consciousness which creates progressively higher material forms till it reaches the Supramental form.

A spiritual unfolding of all potentials is the hidden truth of our birth in Matter and if this is so then the human being of today is too imperfect — a transitional being. If the human being is not capable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed by the manifestation of a higher principle — the Supermind. This requires a laborious process of transformation and a technique dealing with the process of living in the soul. The process is difficult and complex as the evolution starts from the Inconscience. And the process is novel as it does not conform to the known ways of development. It soars beyond morality, beyond intellectuality, beyond the established norms of religion. While the mind in Ignorance gropes for the Truth that always remains illusory, the Supermind represents the Truth-Consciousness. In a Supramental world, imperfection and disharmony are absent.

What has been proposed is to bring the Supramental as a power into the earth consciousness and let it work there. This implies a work of transformation that cannot be done individually. It is quite natural that at first a few shall get the full Light but still a few should get it partially. Once what has been gained by the few is completed, a generalisation can occur.

— Dr. Soumitra Basu

Our Divine Destiny

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Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

One must not take consequences for causes.

~The Mother



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