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Every once in a while the mind conjures a new perspective simply to excite itself out of stagnancy. Concepts can be many of which one is that of Life. This life that seems to slip from one day to the next, almost in a comatose at times. So how can one feel that drive to go the extra inch, to feel enthusiastic for the day to come, to feel the adrenalin of facing yet another challenging moment?

Here's an idea...life is a sport. Earth is our field. Humanity is our team. We compete not with each other but with the obstacles thrown in our way by life itself. Our human companions help us along the way, a leap here, a jump there. One gain is a victory for the team. One loss is an opportunity for our team to buck up, double its effort, make up for lost time. Our ever watchful Leader is always at hand. Blowing the whistle that warns. Lending a hand when one stumbles. How can one not want to take this game to the end, the finishing line, the last goal? How can one not yearn to touch that wonderful trophy that lies bathed in the colour of the sun?

Life is not merely a game... it is the greatest sport. Played on a glorious and vast playing field. With the most endearing companions ever. And most importantly, a Leader who never gives up on the players. All we need is the right team spirit and the race is won.

Until the next time...

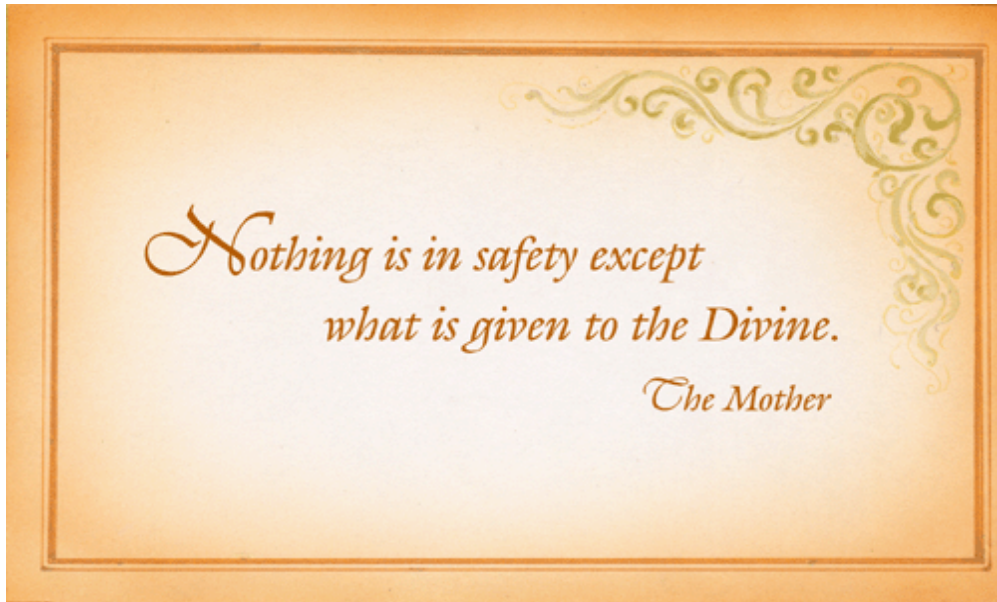
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Living Words

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Flowers and their Messages

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In our series of "Qualities required for living", for August we presented the flower signifying Humility. For this month, we continue our journey with "Endurance".



Spiritual Name	Endurance "Going to the end of the effort without fatigue or relaxation."
Botanical Name	Zinnia elegans
Common Name	Common zinnia, Youth-and old age

General Description

Zinnia is a coarse, upright, bushy annual with opposite, sandpapery, lance shaped leaves. The ray flowers are found in different colours, shapes and sizes.

They are easy to grow in well drained, rich loamy soil, in the open with full sun. They do best in climates with long, hot, dry summers. Propagation can be done by sowing seeds or through seedlings. They are sensitive to root disturbance, so care has to be taken when transplanting. They produce larger (but fewer) flowers if the side shoots are removed. Zinnia are traditionally used in annual flower beds and borders. The dwarf varieties can be as used containers and window planters. The taller varieties in borders and beds and


for cut flowers.

The Mother on Endurance

If you are not able to face difficulties without getting discouraged and without giving up, because it is too difficult; and if you are incapable... well, of receiving blows and yet continuing, of "pocketing" them, as they say-when you receive blows as a result of your defects, of putting them in your pocket and continuing to go forward without flagging-you don't go very far; at the first turning where you lose sight of your little habitual life, you fall into despair and give up the game.

The most... how shall I put it? the most material form of this is perseverance. Unless you are resolved to begin the same thing over again a thousand times if need be... You know, people come to me in despair, "But I thought it was done and now I must begin again!" And if they are told, "But that's nothing, you will probably have to begin again a hundred times, two hundred times, a thousand times; you take one step forward and think you are secure, but there will always be something to bring back the same difficulty a little farther on. You think you have solved the problem, you must solve it yet once again; it will turn up again looking just a little different, but it will be the same problem", and if you are not determined that: "Even if it comes back a million times, I shall do it a million times, but I shall go through with it", well, you won't be able to do the yoga. This is absolutely indispensable. People have a beautiful experience and say, "Ah, now this is it!..." And then it settles down, diminishes, gets veiled, and suddenly something quite unexpected, absolutely commonplace and apparently completely uninteresting comes before you and blocks your way. And then you say, "Ah! what's the good of having made this progress if it's going to start all over again? Why should I do it? I made an effort, I succeeded, achieved something, and now it's as if I had done nothing! It's indeed hopeless." For you have no endurance. If one has endurance, one says, "It's all right. Good, I shall begin again as often as necessary; a thousand times, ten thousand times, a hundred thousand times if necessary, I shall begin again -but I shall go to the end .

The Mother



Question of the Month

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Some Important Questions in Life?

We often receive questions from aspirants, who are not satisfied with their present lives, who are trying to find a meaning in their lives, a deeper reason for why things happen as they do, and who are searching for a light to guide them in their actions.

Each month we take a question of this nature and present an answer based on the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, with the belief that this could be of help to a larger number of persons. We welcome further comments on making our endeavour beneficial to all.

Most of us go through life, without even asking ourselves the most important questions in our lives.

Question : Why am I here? Why is there an earth? Why do I live? What am I meant to do?

Yet, these are exactly the questions to which we must help our children to find an answer. Here is the Mother's beautiful talk to the children of the Ashram, which is meant for the children of the whole world.

Two Paths

There are two very different lines; they can converge because everything can be made to converge; but as I said, there are two lines really very different. One is a perpetual choice, not only of what one reads but of what one does, of what one thinks, of all one's activities, of strictly doing only what can help you on the spiritual path; it does not necessarily have to be very narrow and limited, but it must be on a little higher plane than the ordinary life, and with a concentration of will and aspiration which does not allow any wandering on the path, going here and there uselessly. This is austere; it is difficult to take up this when one is very young, because one feels that the instrument that he is has not been sufficiently formed or is not rich enough to be allowed to remain what it is without growing and progressing. So, generally speaking, except for a very small number, it comes later, after a certain development and some experience of life.

The other path is that of as complete, as integral a development as possible of all human faculties, of all that one carries in himself, all one's possibilities, then, spreading out as widely as possible in all directions, in order to fill one's consciousness with all human possibilities, to know the world and life and men and their work as it now is, to create a vast and rich base for the future ascent.

Usually this is what we expect of children; except as I said, in absolutely rare, exceptional cases of children who have in them a psychic being which has already had all the experiences before incarnating this time, and no longer needs any more experiences, which only wants to realise the Divine and live Him. But these, you see, are one-in-a-million cases. Otherwise, till a certain age, so long as one is very young, it is good to develop oneself, to spread out as much as possible in all directions, to draw out all the potentialities one holds, and turn them into expressed, conscious, active things, so as to have a fairly solid foundation for the ascent. Otherwise it is a bit poor.

Love to Learn

That is why you must learn, love to learn, always learn, not waste your time in... well, in filling yourself with useless things or doing useless things. You must do everything with this aim, to enrich your possibilities, develop those you have, acquire new ones, and become as complete, as perfect a human being as you can. That is, even on this line you must take things seriously, not simply pass your time because you are here, and waste it as much as possible because you have to pass it somehow.

They don't know why

That is the attitude of men in general: they come into life, they don't know why; they know that they will live a certain number of years, they don't know why; they think that they will have to pass away because everybody passes away, and they again don't know why; and then, most of the time they are bored because they have nothing in themselves, they are empty beings and there is nothing more boring than emptiness; and so they try to fill this by distraction, they become absolutely useless, and when they reach the end they have wasted their whole existence, all their possibilities-and everything is lost. This you will see: take a thousand men, out of them at least nine hundred and ninety are in this condition. It happens that they are born in certain circumstances or certain others, and they try, you see, to pass their time as well as they can, to be bored as little as possible, to suffer as little as possible, to have as good a time as possible; and everything is dull, lifeless, useless, stupid, and absolutely without any result. There, then.

This is the majority of human beings, and they don't even think... they don't even ask themselves, "But indeed, why am I here? Why is there an earth? Why are there men? Why do I live?" No, all these things are absolutely uninteresting. The only interesting thing is to try to eat well, to have good fun, be nicely distracted, well married, have children, earn money and have all the advantages one can get from the point of view of desires, and above all, above all not think, not reflect, not ask any questions, and avoid all trouble. Yes, and then get out of it like that, without too many catastrophes. This is the general condition; this is what men call being reasonable. And in this way the world can turn round indefinitely for eternity, it will never progress. And this is why all these are like ants; they come, crawl, die, go away, come back, crawl again, die again, and so on. And it can last for eternities like this.

On which side one wants to be

Fortunately there are some who do the work of all the others, but it's only these who will make everything change one day.

So the first problem is to know on which side one wants to be: on the side of those who are doing something or the side of those who do nothing; on the side of those who, perhaps, will be able to understand what life is and do what is necessary for this life to culminate in something, or else of those who hardly care to understand anything at all and try to pass their time in having as few botherations as possible. Above all, no botherations!

There we are. This is the first choice. After this there are many others.

So there, my children.

Now, if you wish to have a meditation, say so. Yes or no? Yes? Good! Try to eliminate from your consciousness all that is darkly attached to living uselessly.

The Mother



The Mother's commentaries on the Dhammapada were given between August 1957 and September 1958 to the members of Her Friday class at the Ashram Playground. After reading a chapter of the text, the Mother spoke about the points which interested Her and then asked the class to meditate on them. She did not systematically discuss all the Dhammapada verses, but she did cover most of the central ideas in the text.

We will be reproducing each of the sessions in order of sequence in this series.

One who does good rejoices in the two worlds

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The Mother

Conjugate Verses

One who does good rejoices in the two worlds, in this world and in the other. He rejoices more and more as he recalls his good deeds.

One who does evil suffers in the two worlds, in this world and in the other. "I have done wrong": this thought torments him. And his torments increase still more as he follows the way which leads to the infernal world.

One who does good rejoices in the two worlds, in this world and in the other. "I have done good": the thought rejoices him and his happiness increases more and more as he follows the way that leads to the celestial world.

It would almost seem from these texts that Buddhism accepts the idea of a hell and a heaven; but that is quite a superficial way of understanding; for, in a deeper sense, this was not the thought of the Buddha. The idea on which he always insisted is that you create, by your conduct and the state of your consciousness, the world in which you live. Everyone carries in himself the world in which he lives and in which he will continue to live even when he loses his body, because, according to the Buddha's teaching, there is, so to say, no difference between life in the body and life outside the body.

Some persons believe, some traditions teach that to leave the body is a blessing and that all difficulties disappear, provided, however, you fulfil certain rites, as in some religions, and that is also why so much importance is given to the religious rites which are, as it

were, a passport for going to a happier region once you have left the body. Some even imagine that as soon as you leave the body you at once leave your miseries behind; but it is far from being true and this is what the Dhammapada points out here: what it calls the infernal world consists of psychological ranges, particular states of consciousness you enter when you do wrong, that is to say, when you stray away from all that is beautiful, pure, happy and you live in ugliness and wickedness. Nothing is more disheartening than to live in an atmosphere of wickedness.

What the Dhammapada says here in an almost puerile way is essentially true. Naturally, it does not refer to those who think, "Oh, how good I am, how nice I am!" and therefore feel happy. That is childishness. But when you are good, when you are generous, noble, disinterested, kind, you create in you, around you, a particular atmosphere and this atmosphere is a sort of luminous release. You breathe, you blossom like a flower in the sun; there is no painful recoil on yourself, no bitterness, no revolt, no miseries. Spontaneously, naturally, the atmosphere becomes luminous and the air you breathe is full of happiness. And this is the air that you breathe, in your body and out of your body, in the waking state and in the state of sleep, in life and in the passage beyond life, outside earthly life until your new life.

Every wrong action produces on the consciousness the effect of a wind that withers, of a cold that freezes or of burning flames that consume.

Every good and kind deed brings light, restfulness, joy - the sunshine in which flowers bloom.

3 January 1958



Indigenous Peoples and the Quest for Wholeness

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Aidan

Rankin

Early in February, news reached the western press of a brutal double killing in the Andaman Islands, an Indian-ruled archipelago off the coasts of Burma and Malaysia. Two Indian fishermen, apparently intoxicated, were ambushed as they slept overnight in their boat near North Sentinel Island. As soon as news broke of the deaths of Sunder Raj and Pandit Tawari, sensational reports of 'primitive' and 'backward' tribesmen gathered momentum. The indigenous Sentinelese were portrayed as a people living in the 'Stone Age', missing out on all the 'advantages' of 'modern civilisation', and yet engaged in a quixotic struggle against that modernity. The triumph of 'progress' was 'inevitable' and such progress involved the dissolution of economic and cultural boundaries and the end of everything that made the Sentinelese and other tribal peoples distinctive. In other words, the Sentinelese could not 'hold back the tide' of global capitalism and consumer culture. Their attempts to do so were proof of their backwardness, superstition and irrational hostility to the outside world.

Despite the blatant, unapologetic racism of such reports, it was the Sentinelese who were depicted as xenophobes, whose 'distrust' of outsiders resulted in murder. In the English speaking world, it did not occur to any avowed anti-racist organisation or commentator to protest against this coverage, perhaps because such movements and individuals are themselves mesmerised by ideals of progress and modernity. However Survival International, which has championed the rights of tribal peoples since 1969, launched a campaign called Stamp It Out, demanding an end to such language in the media. Words like primitive are 'fundamentally a throwback to a colonial way of thinking', according to Survival's director Stephen Corry. 'You cannot say 'primitive' without assuming these peoples are somehow inferior'.

By their very existence, people like the Sentinelese threaten the present western mindset. Rather than suggesting cultural confidence, descriptions of indigenous peoples as primitive and crude determinism about the inevitability of 'progress' are indications of fear. By dismissing their experiences, we can put off confronting our own demons for a while longer. The pretence of superiority shields us, temporarily, from the growing breakdown of our own society, the failure of materialism to bring stability, let alone happiness, and the festering wounds of racism and poverty. Yet it also stands between us and a reasoned - as opposed to narrowly rationalist - critique of many of our prevailing economic and cultural assumptions. The growing environmental crisis requires this process of questioning, and this includes opening ourselves to other ways of looking at the world.

The deaths of Sunder Raj and Pandit Tawari are two individual tragedies that should neither be trivialised nor downplayed. But it is equally misleading to downplay the concerns of the Sentinelese or dismiss their obsessive vigilance as irrational. For the Sentinelese, like other indigenous peoples, have reason to be suspicious of outsiders. Although they have avoided, or actively resisted, contact with the 'outside world' for up to 60,000 years, the hunter-gatherer tribe now number fewer than two hundred men, women and children. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, many Sentinelese were killed by wreckage salvagers who brought guns to North Sentinel when searching for iron and other goods from a shipwreck. Their island has also been visited in recent years by more and more outsiders, diving for lobsters and hunting pigs, activities that deprive the tribe of essential food sources. As a result of lobbying from Survival, and the locally based Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology (SANE), the tribal peoples of the islands now enjoy some protection. This has come too late, perhaps, for the Jarawa, who opened themselves to the forces of 'progress' in 1998. As a result they are, in Survival's words, 'plagued by intruders on their land stealing the animals they hunt, bringing in alcohol and sexually exploiting Jarawa women'.

In this context, it is easy to see why the Sentinelese guard their privacy so jealously. The fishermen were killed through a tragic misunderstanding, but their presence in Sentinelese territory was illegal and (in the light of past incidents) provocative. They did not 'deserve' to die, but in making moral judgements about their deaths we would do well to remember that the Sentinelese were acting in defence of their common property and heritage. At no stage have they attempted to invade other territories or use force to impose their world view on others. There is, one could argue, an element of the Sentinelese in all those who, in great and small ways, resist the dominance of faceless corporations and bureaucracies, favour the local over the global economy and seek to reduce the impact of human activity on the planet. Such ideas and the actions they inspire, challenge the belief that a uniform global culture is inevitable and that progress means the same as western consumerism.

After the tsunami of December 2004, Sentinelese were photographed firing arrows at a helicopter flying over their island. This was the first indication that the indigenous peoples of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands had survived this catastrophe. Because they lacked western technologies, it was feared that most or all of them would be swept away. What quickly emerged, however, was a remarkable story of survival, in which traditional knowledge transmitted through the generations enabled the islanders to protect themselves by escaping to higher ground. As a result, their communities were preserved virtually intact, in contrast to those who emigrated to the islands from South-East Asia several centuries ago. The Onge tribe, for example, have lived on Little Andaman for up to 50,000 years and have a folklore that tells of 'huge shaking of ground followed by a high wall of water'. They, along with neighbouring peoples like the surviving Jarawa, fled to higher, thickly forested regions as soon as they felt intimations of the earthquake. They knew about tsunamis through their oral tradition and this knowledge proved to be the most sophisticated technology, making them more attuned to natural forces than the 'advanced' tourist centres of the region. It is ironic that peoples who are told that they cannot hold back the tide of progress should rise above a devastating 'harbour-wave'.

The Andaman Islanders' ecological sensibility should give westerners pause for thought. We are, after all, becoming aware that our attachment to growth is preventing us from coming to terms with the destructive impact of continuous economic expansion. The indigenous world view once seemed constricted, in comparison to ours, because it was geographically limited, less technologically advanced and placing the group before the individual. Today, faced with pollution and climate change, we can see the advantages of living within natural limits. Our definition of technology now goes well beyond heavy industry and we realise increasingly that true individual freedom includes a sense of community, indeed depends on it.

It is hard to generalise about indigenous cultures, but they can be said to share a more rounded, holistic approach to nature than the western model. They are aware of that all life forms are subtly but intimately connected and bring this sense of interconnectedness to bear on their social and political organisation. They do not require lectures from western liberals because they are ahead of industrialised societies on sexual equality, without trying to force men and women to be identical. Indigenous peoples see themselves as stewards rather than consumers of natural resources, conserving them where possible for future generations. This is why the Kalahari 'Bushmen', for example, have been able to survive successfully for scores of thousands of years in conditions of extreme aridity. The government of Botswana dismisses them as 'Stone Age' and regards their survival skills as worthless, but it is fixated on ideas of 'modernisation' that have led to hunger and oppression throughout the continent.

For indigenous peoples, the environment cannot be parcelled out because it is common property, an extension of human society, on which humans depend. The Penan of Sarawak do not have a word for 'thank you' because sharing is commonplace. No hunter can eat a single bite more than he gives to others, however small the prey. Likewise, the Innu Indians of Labrador worship and revere the animals they hunt, seeing them as part of a cycle of creation. This awareness of cycles as well as straight lines, of interdependence as well as uniqueness, matches the most recent conclusions of modern science, which, ironically, are challenging conventional ideas of progress. An indigenous person would easily understand the concept of Gaia, the earth as a self-regenerating organism. And in concepts such as dark matter and parallel universe, we discover the continuity between 'myth' and 'fact' that ancient cultures take for granted.

Far from being primitive or backward, indigenous cultures can provide pioneering approaches to the social and environmental problems facing humanity as a whole. Nunavut, the recently created autonomous region of the Inuit (Eskimo) has built into its legal system the principle of restorative justice and community-based punishment supervised by tribal elders. The system is working because it has full community support and is based on consensus. As Premier Paul Okalik explains, Nunavut is 'trying to avoid the "stovepipe" approach that often plagues governments. Three departments - Health and Social Services, Education and Justice - are working closely together'. In other words, they are applying the principle of interdependence to provide radical alternatives to prison.

Nunavut's governing philosophy is known as 'Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit', or 'traditional knowledge'. This is a mouthful even for most Inuit, and so it is known simply as IQ. Unlike the western notion of intelligence quotient - used to support racist claims that black people are 'less intelligent' - IQ encompasses emotional intelligence and includes concepts such as environmental stewardship, collaborative relationships and consensus decision making, as well as 'being resourceful to solve problems'. This balance of initiative and co-operation is in effect a system of natural law, applying the best principles of evolution. And evolution, as indigenous societies have long known, is at least as much about successful collaboration as competitive impulses. For the green movement, IQ would be a far better philosophical basis than the failed 'progressive' ideologies of the left or the market fundamentalism of the right.

Further south, the Iroquois Nation has based its political process on the Seventh Generation Principle. This requires elders to attempt to look hundreds of years into the future as they weigh up the consequences of their decisions. They are obliged equally to look into the past and view their ancestors as sources of wisdom and insight. This is an organic view of society that sees the generations as interconnected rather than transient. It is conservative in the true sense, but its implications for our approach to the world's resources are radical, indeed revolutionary.

The Seventh Generation Principle matches a little-known clause in the Preamble to the US Constitution, which cites an obligation to 'secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity'. With this in mind, some Native Americans propose a Seventh Generation Amendment to the Constitution, enshrining:

'The right of citizens of the United States to use and enjoy air, water, wildlife, and other renewable resources determined by the Congress to be common property shall not be impaired, nor shall such use impair their availability for the use of future generations'.

This movement is in its infancy, but it is one of the most profound political developments of our time and its significance will grow. The Amendment fuses western legal reasoning with the intuitive understanding of the indigenous world, humanising the former and universalising the latter. It offers us, the true 'primitives', a way beyond our superstitious form of economics. And surely Sri Aurobindo would have recognised in the Seventh Generation Principle that balance of tradition of continuity, spiritual insight and practical deeds, which made his life's work so distinctive and valuable.

*(Aidan Rankin's book *The Jain Path: Ancient Wisdom for the West* will be published later in 2006 by O Books. www.o-books.net Email: aidan.rankin@ukonline.co.uk)*

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Sri Aurobindo observed that the "Upanishads are at once profound religious scriptures, - for they are a record of the deepest spiritual experiences, - documents of revelatory and intuitive philosophy of an inexhaustible light, power and largeness and, whether written in verse or in cadenced prose, spiritual poems of an absolute, an unfailing inspiration inevitable in phrase, wonderful in rhythm and expression." He further writes about the structure of the Upanishads: "There is a perfect totality, a comprehensive connection of harmonious parts in the structure of each Upanishad; but it is done in the way of a mind that sees masses of truth at a time and stops to bring only the needed word out of a filled silence. The rhythm in verse or cadenced prose corresponds to the sculpture of the thought and the phrase. The metrical forms of the Upanishads are made up of the four half-lines each clearly cut, the lines mostly complete in themselves and integral in sense, the half-lines presenting two thoughts or distinct parts of a thought that are wedded to and complete each other, and the sound movement follows a corresponding principle, each step brief and marked off by the distinctness of its pause, full of echoing cadences that remain long vibrating in the inner hearing: each is as if a wave of the infinite that carries in it the whole voice and rumour of the ocean. It is a kind of poetry, - word of vision, rhythm of the spirit, - that has not been written before or after."

We present below the verse one of the Kena Upanishad translated by Sri Aurobindo along with a commentary.

केनोपनिषत्

kenopanishat

ॐ केनेषितं पतति प्रेषितं मनः
केन प्राणः प्रथमः प्रैति युक्तः ।
केनेषिता वाचमिमां वदन्ति
चक्षुः श्रोत्रं क उ देवो युनक्ति ॥

om keneṣitaṁ patati preṣitaṁ manaḥ
kena prāṇaḥ prathamāḥ praiti yuktaḥ
keneṣitāṁ vācamimāṁ vadanti
cakṣuḥ śrotraṁ ka u devo yunakti

By whom missioned falls the mind shot to its mark?
By whom yoked moves the first life-breath forward
on its paths? By whom impelled is this word that
men speak? What god set eye and ear to their
workings?

Commentary

The Question. What Godhead?

Mind is the principal agent of the lower or phenomenal consciousness; vital force or the life-breath, speech and the five senses of knowledge are the instruments of the mind. Prana, the life-force in the nervous system, is indeed the one main instrument of our mental consciousness; for it is that by which the mind receives the contacts of the physical world through the organs of knowledge, sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, and reacts upon its object by speech and the other four organs of action; all these senses are dependent upon the nervous life-force for their functioning. The Upanishad therefore begins by a query as to the final source or control of the activities of the Mind, Life-Force, Speech, Senses.

The question is, kena, by whom or what? In the ancient conception of the universe our material existence is formed from the five elemental states of Matter, the ethereal, aerial, fiery, liquid and solid; everything that has to do with our material existence is called the elemental, adhibhuta. In this material there move non-material powers manifesting through the Mind-Force and Life-Force that work upon Matter, and these are called Gods or Devas; everything that has to do with the working of the non-material in us is called adhidaiva, that which pertains to the Gods. But above the non-material powers, containing them, greater than they is the Self or Spirit, atman, and everything that has to do with this highest existence in us is called the spiritual, adhyatma. For the purpose of the Upanishads the adhidaiva is the subtle in us; it is that which is represented by Mind and Life as opposed to gross Matter; for in Mind and Life we have the characteristic action of the Gods.

The Upanishad is not concerned with the elemental, the adhibhuta; it is concerned with the relation between the subtle existence and the spiritual, the adhidaiva and adhyatma. But the Mind, the Life, the speech, the senses are governed by cosmic powers, by Gods, by Indra, Vayu, Agni. Are these subtle cosmic powers the beginning of existence, the true

movers of mind and life, or is there some superior unifying force, one in itself behind them all?

By whom or what is the mind missioned and sent on its errand so that it falls on its object like an arrow shot by a skilful archer at its predetermined mark, like a messenger, an envoy sent by his master to a fixed place for a fixed object? What is it within us or without us that sends forth the mind on its errand? What guides it to its object?

Then there is the life-force, the Prana, that works in our vital being and nervous system. The Upanishad speaks of it as the first or supreme Breath; elsewhere in the sacred writings it is spoken of as the chief Breath or the Breath of the mouth, mukhya, asanya; it is that which carries in it the Word, the creative expression. In the body of man there are said to be five workings of the life-force called the five Pranas. One specially termed Prana moves in the upper part of the body and is preeminently the breath of life, because it brings the universal life-force into the physical system and gives it there to be distributed. A second in the lower part of the trunk, termed Apana, is the breath of death; for it gives away the vital force out of the body. A third, the Samana, regulates the interchange of these two forces at their meeting-place, equalises them and is the most important agent in maintaining the equilibrium of the vital forces and their functions. A fourth, the Vyana, pervasive, distributes the vital energies throughout the body. A fifth, the Udana, moves upward from the body to the crown of the head and is a regular channel of communication between the physical life and the greater life of the spirit. None of these are the first or supreme Breath, although the Prana most nearly represents it; the Breath to which so much importance is given in the Upanishads, is the pure life-force itself,-first, because all the others are secondary to it, born from it and only exist as its special functions. It is imaged in the Veda as the Horse; its various energies are the forces that draw the chariots of the Gods. The Vedic image is recalled by the choice of the terms employed in the Upanishad, yukta, yoked, praiti, goes forward, as a horse driven by the charioteer advances in its path.

Who then has yoked this life-force to the many workings of existence or by what power superior to itself does it move forward in its paths? For it is not primal, self-existent or its own agent. We are conscious of a power behind which guides, drives, controls, uses it.

The force of the vital breath enables us to bring up and speed outward from the body this speech that we use to express, to throw out into a world of action and new-creation the willings and thought-formations of the mind. It is propelled by Vayu, the life-breath; it is formed by Agni, the secret will-force and fiery shaping energy in the mind and body. But these are the agents. Who or what is the secret Power that is behind them, the master of the word that men speak, its real former and the origin of that which expresses itself?

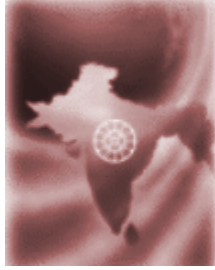
The ear hears the sound, the eye sees the form; but hearing and vision are particular operations of the life-force in us used by the mind in order to put itself into communication with the world in which the mental being dwells and to interpret it in the forms of sense. The life-force shapes them, the mind uses them, but something other than the life-force and the mind enables them to shape and to use their objects and their

instruments. What God sets eye and ear to their workings? Not Surya, the God of light, not Ether and his regions; for these are only conditions of vision and hearing.

The Gods combine, each bringing his contribution, the operations of the physical world that we observe as of the mental world that is our means of observation; but the whole universal action is one, not a sum of fortuitous atoms; it is one, arranged in its parts, combined in its multiple functionings by virtue of a single conscient existence which can never be constructed or put together (akrita) but is for ever anterior to all these workings. The Gods work only by this Power anterior to themselves, live only by its life, think only by its thought, act only for its purposes. We look into ourselves and all things and become aware of it there, an "I", an "Is", a Self, which is other, firmer, vaster than any separate or individual being.

But since it is not anything that the mind can make its object or the senses throw into form for the mind, what then is it-or who? What absolute Spirit? What one, supreme and eternal Godhead? Ko devah.

Sri Aurobindo



Resurgent India

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Old is New

You have seen them on stage or the telly. Five or six unmistakably Indian men in colourful oversized turbans. A couple of rugged middle aged vocalists among them, ranging high and low. A drummer with a toothy grin. Maybe a wizened old man plying his bow on the strings of a kamayacha. An impish young boy or two clacking away on pairs of khartals held in each palm. One of the singers is squeezing a harmonium and belting away. The other vocalist waits for a cue to join the ride. The drummer rouses his dholak. The boys rise on their knees and arc and weave their arms as they clack on. The old man plies his bow quietly. The colour of their costumes, the sounds of the desert, the passion in their voices and the animation of the boys makes it more than a concert. It is gripping theatre, as audiences world-wide have come to realise. To send a Manganiyar group on stage is at once to evoke India itself.

[Langas, that are referred to as we go, are musical cousins to Manganiyars. Their art is identical except that Langas are accompanied by a saranghi instead of the kamayacha. Both are string instruments, but the saranghi has more strings and so, is richer in range demanding greater training and virtuosity from the vocalist.]

Minstrels of the Desert

Strangely, for artistes who so visibly enjoy their act, Manganiyars were obdurate traditionalists and reluctant to go on stage. In the wide and desolate country of Sind and north west Rajasthan, Manganiyars have for centuries survived on the patronage of wealthy merchants in caravan towns. At times of birth, marriage or any family festivity, the Manganiyar troupe would be in attendance evoking the right mood with songs of the desert and many specially composed by them in praise of the patron and his family. As they owed allegiance to the same patron's family for generations, it's no surprise that they were also keepers of the family tree! They would weave into their songs, ancestors' enterprise, heroism, character, pedigree, and -without fail- generosity! Little incidents of the past were embellished with imagination and poetry. The patron assured them an annuity and so survived the Manganiyars' world till the fifties.

There is another eye-opening aspect to the Manganiyars. While their patrons were invariably Hindus, they were always Muslims, though with a twist. They were indeed devoted to Islam but without any rigidity. There were, until recently Shankar Khans and

Krishna Khans among them.

The story of how, in the changing economy of India, as their patrons' fortunes began to wane, the Manganiyar craft found new support, cannot be told without getting to know Prof. Komal Kothari.

"It Will Rob My Voice!"

Born in Jodhpur, in 1929, Komal Kothari studied in Udaipur. In 1953, he started a magazine called 'Prerna' along with a close friend of many years, Vijay Dandetha. Prerna set itself the task of discovering and transcribing a new folk song every month. His family's nationalist leanings and Kothari's love of music and fine arts amalgamated into an interest in another genre of Rajasthani folk songs. These were songs created between 1800 and 1942, by common folk of Rajasthan that focused on anti-British sentiments. That opened his eyes to the richness of creativity that lay undiscovered.

After several adventures in Shantiniketan, ghost-writing and fine arts journalism Kothari, in 1958 found himself at Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Academy.

And there began a 40 year long obsession to record for posterity, many of the dying strands of folk singing. The obsession continues.

In 1960, he ran into Antar Khan, a Manganiyar in the street. Kothari knew the Manganiyar culture was under pressure. Why not bring them to the notice of the world through recordings? He led Khan to his office to sing for him.

"I was preparing my vintage tape recorder to record him," says Kothari. "It took a few minutes. When I turned around, he was gone. I went to the door and looked out. There he was, sprinting away. I chased him and caught up after some effort. Turned out, he feared the machine will swallow his voice away forever, if he sang in front of it!"

Beginning a Growing Archive

During the next two years, Kothari made several trips to Jaisalmer, which is Manganiyar country. He explained the technology of recording and assuaged their anxieties. He lectured them on the promise of worldwide publicity and a new livelihood for them.

Then in 1962, the first ever recording of Langa music took place!

And again, in 1963, a Manganiyar troupe performed in Delhi, for the first time on stage.

But Kothari wanted to take them farther afield and show-case them for global audiences.

Intense all night rehearsals ran between 1965 and 1970. Kothari and a small band of dedicated culture activists worked on their stage craft, repertoire, programme planning etc.

In 1967, Kothari traveled to Sweden with a troupe of Langas for the first ever performance outside India. Soon the Indian Council of Cultural Research [ICCR] got into the act. Acclaim, interest, invitations and recognition followed thick and fast. By the time India staged the popular Festivals of India all over the world in the mid eighties, Manganiyars and Langas had become the darlings of audiences drawn to India. Today, Rajasthan's tourism industry is driven quite substantially by these charismatic performers.

Komal Kothari himself has come to be loved by them as their godfather. But he has moved on to his original obsession: record folk music for posterity.

Rupayan and the Work!

In 1964 Kothari had started 'Rupayan' in Jodhpur to co-ordinate archival recordings. Collaborating with scholars from Sweden, Australia, UK and France he has carried on the work ceaselessly.

"The idea of creating such an archive was indeed that of Deben Bhattacharya, an Indian music scholar, settled in Paris," says Prof. Kothari. "Now in his eighties, his vision was global in scale. Mine is restricted to Rajasthan. Deben's wife is Swedish and that is how the interest spread to Sweden. But one of the dynamos of the project was Genevieve Dournon who was with Musee les Homme in Paris in the sixties. She raised the funds, created awareness and brought people together."

Prof. Komal Kothari is a handsome man in his seventies working out of a modest home in Jodhpur. He still travels extensively and isn't slowing down yet. But there is an air of reflective awe in his observations.

"I am amazed at how these simple folks have mastered their instruments, codified their craft and marketed themselves over the centuries," he says. "And now, despite their initial reluctance, they have quite rapidly adapted to the new potential. They seek markets, travel the world, deliver professional performances and handle success with great suavity. I laugh when I hear of backwardness of India's unlettered masses."

And then, after a time, he whispers meditatively: "It seems the relevance of every art form changes with every generation."

What he does not add is that he has given, to the Manganiyars and Langas a new relevance in our times.

*(Komal Kothari can be contacted at Rupayan Sansthan, Paota- b/2 Road, Jodhpur - 342 010. Phone: 545350.
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(This article was taken from <http://www.goodnewsindia.com> GoodNewsIndia is dedicated to little known stories of positive action and is published by D. V. Sridharan)



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The Inner Eye

Ghalib

If in a drop of water
One cannot see the river
Nor see the full
In the smallest part
What use is this eye?
It's but a toy
For a child to play
For only that eye
Is the real eye
Which can see
The whole in a part
Or the river in a drop.



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One can live in a number of ways, and no one can be a judge of how life is to be lived. But there are times when we may find that life itself has become an art &–; the entire process of living is transformed from something mechanical and separate to ourselves to something which is deeply personal and conducted with the finesse of an artist. Our attitude which may have been complacent at one time, may at another become ever-changing and persevering, similar to the persistence of the painter’s stroke until he arrives at the perfection that he seeks. Along the way, much happens &–; much is learnt. In the end we have the masterpiece of the realization.

In the Art of Life, we will introduce such instances where a perception, an attitude, an insight, an experience, can bring out some beautiful aspects of human nature. Each tale may not be true in the strictest sense of the word or that which is apparent to the eye and understood by the mind, but underneath the surface, in subtle terms it explores and expresses itself, and lets out the fragrance of its inner truth for all to take in.

Voice of Compassion

I heard a story about Fiorello LaGuardia who was mayor of New York City during the worst days of the Great Depression and all of WWII. He was adored by many New Yorkers who took to calling him the "Little Flower" because of his name and the fact that he was so short and always wore a carnation in his lapel.

He was a colorful character -- he rode the New York City fire trucks, raided city "speakeasies" with the police department, took entire orphanages to baseball games and when the New York newspapers went on strike, he got on the radio and read the Sunday funnies to the kids.

One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's

husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving.

But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a real bad neighborhood, Your Honor," the man told the mayor. "She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson."

LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions. Ten dollars or ten days in jail." But even as he pronounced sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous hat, saying, "Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Hr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered woman who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. Fifty cents of that amount was contributed by the grocery store owner himself, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation.

Someone beautifully said. "Sympathy sees and says, 'I'm sorry.' Compassion sees and says, 'I'll help.' " When we learn the difference, we can make a difference.

The Wonder that is Sanskrit

"...it will not be a good day for India when the ancient tongue ceases entirely to be written or spoken."

So prophesied Sri Aurobindo about Devabhasha, the language of the gods, otherwise known as Sanskrit. There is a growing awareness of late of the genius behind this ancient language. People from all walks of life are discovering how it relates to their life and more importantly, how it enhances the quality of life itself. Over the next twelve months we will put across some of these views from around the world which will help our readers appreciate and understand the worth of Sanskrit and the need for a conscious resurgence.

Sanskrit: A Complete Success

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One of the remarkable features of Sanskrit is that it is an extremely rich and efflorescent language. The vastness and the versatility, and power of expression of Sanskrit are beyond comparison. Yet it is as precise as Mathematics and Music. Like Mathematics it has the power to uplift the brain and like Music it has the power to uplift the heart. Both are amazingly combined in Sanskrit. One would really appreciate the high musicality of the sounds of Sanskrit which helps a lot to enter into the real sense value of all that gets expressed in this language.

Another noteworthy fact about Sanskrit is that it keeps adding to its richness, becoming fuller and more ornate, but never removing itself too far from its original roots. Each and every word in Sanskrit is conscious of its origin and always refers back to the root from which it is derived. Therefore there is a perfect relationship between the word and the sense. Sanskrit, in fact, is constructed like geometry and follows a rigorous logic. It is theoretically possible to explain the meaning of the words according to the combined sense of the relative letters, syllables and roots. Therefore in Sanskrit the meaning of any word is not derived by chance or from any convention but from its own depth, the system of root-sounds, sound-ideas. It is because of this transparency of the system of root-sounds and clear semantics that Sanskrit has the ability to discover its own history, and eventually it may lead us to the origin of human speech. A proper investigation of many Sanskrit words shows that in Sanskrit a word is not a conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and the creator of ideas. This transparent system of formation of words from the root-sounds follows a natural process and is one of the important factors that makes Sanskrit an ever creative language. It also provides enough clues to rediscover the lost heritage of Sanskrit.

As for vocabulary, the richness of Sanskrit is considerable and highly diversified. This is the only language which has preserved maximum number of root-sounds that are responsible for the derivation of words. A statistical study made by one scholar shows that from its stock of two thousand root-sounds we can derive more than three hundred million Sanskrit words. This is the language in which one is free to choose or create one's

own words within a given system of rules. There is hardly any other language to match this.

Sanskrit is remarkable for its clarity and inspiration. And that clarity and inspiration is directly responsible for a brilliance of creative expression such as the world has rarely seen. The richness of Sanskrit language is almost beyond belief. Many centuries ago that language contained words to describe states of the conscious and the subconscious and the unconscious mind and a variety of other concepts which have been evolved by modern psychoanalysis. In fact, this language is extremely elaborate and is capable of describing multiple levels of meditation, states of consciousness and psychic, spiritual and even intellectual processes. It has maximum number of words for the Divine and more precise terms for defining consciousness and meditative experience. It has a great power to elevate the human consciousness to sublime heights. The thought contents expressed through this language are capable of taking to greater heights, widening and heightening the consciousness of the one who uses it consciously. It is a language which encompasses the infinite variety and richness of life, its moods, its depths and its heights and reflects them like a perfect mirror, without any distortions. Thus, it is a language that is ideally suited to describe and govern the nature of phenomena from the spiritual level to the physical.



Integral Education

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Education is perhaps the most important domain related to human progress. Except, here we do not mean the kind of syllabus oriented teaching imparted solely in school or college, but rather a form of constant learning that takes place through the life of an individual. This kind of education is integral and complete, leaving no area ignored within the human being. Its objective is to forever widen itself, and by developing the right consciousness, be able to rise from truth to higher truth.

Each one has to actively work towards this, framing one's own agenda, aspiring for one's own goal. It isn't a disciple meant only for the chosen few but in fact if practiced consciously can transform the very nature of every being. At the end, it all boils down to something extremely basic but easily forgotten... in the words of The Mother, "Of one thing you can be sure - your future is in your hands. You will become the man you want to be and the higher your ideal and your aspiration, the higher will be your realization, but you must keep a firm resolution and never forget your true aim in life."

In our section called Integral Education, we will put forth concrete ideas of how such a thorough form of learning can be both inculcated in oneself as well as imparted to another.

Sadhana and Sports

Sri Aurobindo

Certainly, Mother does not want only sportsmen in the Ashram: that would make it not an Ashram but a playground. The sports and physical exercises are primarily for the children of the school and they also do not play only but have to attend to their studies as well. Incidentally, they have improved immensely in their health and in discipline and conduct as one very valuable result. Secondarily, the younger Sadhaks are allowed, not enjoined or even recommended, to join in. these sports, but certainly they are not supposed to be sportsmen only; they have other and more important things to do. To be a sportsman must necessarily be a voluntary choice and depends on one having the taste and inclination. There are plenty of people around the Mother herself - X for instance - who would never dream of frequenting the playground or engaging in sports and the Mother also would never think of asking them to do it. So, equally, she could not think of being displeased with you for shunning these delights. Some, of course, might ask why any sports at all in an Ashram which ought to be concerned only with meditation and inner experiences and the escape from life into the Brahman. But that applies only to the ordinary kind of Ashram to which we have got accustomed and this is not that orthodox kind of Ashram. It includes life in Yoga, and once we admit life we can include anything that we find useful for life's ultimate and immediate purpose and not inconsistent with the works of

the Spirit. After all, the orthodox Ashram came into being only after Brahman began to shun all connection with the world and the shadow of Buddhism stalked over all the land and the Ashrams turned into monasteries. The old Ashrams were not entirely like that; the boys and young men who were brought up in them were trained in many things belonging to life: the son of Pururavas and Urvashie practised archery in the Ashram of a Rishi and became an expert bowman, and Kama became disciple of a great sage in order to acquire from him the use of powerful weapons. So there is no a priori ground why sports should be excluded from life of an Ashram like ours where we are trying to equate life with the Spirit.

10 July 1949



Integral Health

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The Wonder of Technology

Dr. Alok Pandey

There is an outer technology of machines and equipment that has been instrumental in making human life a little more comfortable. A lot of time, money and energy continue to be invested the world over in inventing and perfecting more of such technology for the future use of mankind. The development has been stupendous and one has come a long way from Mendel's laws of inheritance, right up to gene-mapping and gene-manipulation.

Is this the only possible direction of development? Is it development at all or does each advancement only brings, as its kickback, a biological amputation?

Our less medicated ancestors perhaps meditated better upon the deeper mystery of life. The universe was throbbing for them with a wonderful Presence. Technology has robbed us of the wonder and the marvel, replacing it with gadgetry that is often complex and stifling, - an imprisonment and enslavement we have learnt to dubiously call ease and comfort whilst real peace and ease have become even more elusive! There seems to be an assumption that the human body and its laws are fixed and unalterable except through external manipulation. This assumption is as fallacious as the one that earlier scientists had made about a static universe. The universe grows and evolves and so does the human body. The pressure of evolution is not yet over. Man is not the last word in Nature. And this excessive reliance on gadgets and machinery in supporting the distressed human body may well work against the evolutionary force. It may lull the body's own powers to heal.

For there is a healing force within. And there is a technology woven into the inner fabric of our lives. This inner technology we must wake up and utilize the outer if we are to master life and conquer death. With outer technology there is always a limit and encumbrance. But the potential of inner technology is practically limitless.

Great wonders have been done mastering the technology devised by man. Greater wonders await us by mastering the technology concealed in man.

(Dr. Alok Pandey has been working in the field of psychiatry with a spiritual approach for more than 15 years. He has developed a working concept of integral health and integral psychology which he is using in his life and practice. He is one of the founders of SAIHR).

The Inner Frown

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M.S.

Srinivasan

An episode from a spiritual lore: A disciple asks the Master: "Sir, why is there so much friction in our community?" The Master does not reply directly. First he says "What is the use of sweet words and pleasant courtesies when there is a frown on your face?" After a pause he says, "What is the use of a smiling face when there is a frown in your thought and feelings?"

For those who are pursuing an inner moral, psychological or spiritual discipline here is a test to see how far and to what extent they have progressed inwardly.

The test is the inner reaction and not the outer behaviour. For, the society and culture of average humanity is made of cultivated hypocrisy. We are forced by society and culture to suppress our negative feelings and present a pleasant outer appearance. So we get along with life hiding our negative feelings behind a mocking, cynical or angry smile or an impassive face, which are some of the common deceptions of culture. Sometimes we are not even aware of our negative feelings. We think we have goodwill for a person. But in a little corner of our mind of which we are not conscious, there is a dark spot of spite or resentment. And since we are not conscious of this dark spot or until we become conscious of it, we may sincerely believe we have goodwill for him. And when we feel an inner friction for the person we wonder "Why, I thought I have only goodwill for him."

Our inner reaction to someone whom we dislike is usually anger, resentment, scorn, sarcasm, disapproval, sense of superiority or harsh judgement. If we are not pursuing any inner or higher discipline, then such reactions are "natural". But if we are making an effort to rise beyond this "natural" state made of likes and dislikes to a higher spiritual nature made of equanimity and calm, then such negative reactions have to be mastered. For, rising beyond likes and dislikes is one of the first conditions of spiritual development. So the test is what is the extent of our mastery over these reactions? How intense is it? How long does it linger? Can we detach ourselves from it and let it pass or are we overwhelmed by it? If we are carried away helplessly by these reactions and cannot do anything with them, then we have not progressed much inwardly, especially in our emotional being, whatever may be the ideas we have in our mind.

We must remember that it is very easy to have good feelings for someone we like, as long as we like. Even a hardened criminal will have good feelings for someone he likes, as long as he likes. This does not mean we have to reject good feelings for someone we like or love. Good feelings, goodwill are the source of harmony in a community. But there is

nothing great about having a superficial good feeling for someone we like or love. Our spiritual mettle is tested only when the relations go sour, we rub against the ego of others and sparks of negative feelings like anger and resentment, critical judgement and condemnation rage and ravage our inner being. In most of the communal life much of this wrestle and clash of the ego and the spark of negative feelings happen within and sometimes nothing of it may be visible outside. The outer life goes on with a deceptive smoothness or even with a lot of laughter, smile and banter. There cannot be true harmony in communal life, unless this inner quarrelling is stopped.

But how to stop it? Before answering this question we have to first of all understand the deeper causes of the inner dislikes, and also our likes. We will not enter into the causes of open quarrel or violent conflicts. We are here mainly concerned with inner quarrels which remains suppressed, hidden and unexpressed outside, creating a constant inner friction between people. One of the grosser forms of inner dislike is jealousy. Among the subtler causes are factors related to what we may call as psychic chemistry. When two psychological substances or energies do not harmonise with each other or vibrate at different rhythms it creates an inner friction which translates itself in the feelings as an irrational inner dislike. Similarly when two persons think, feel and behave very differently due to variations in temperament then also it creates an inner friction. For example, in most of the communities there is an inner conflict between the reserved and the talkative types or the introvert and the extrovert. Someone who is calm, reserved and doesn't talk much becomes an object of inner resentment for other who talk and gossip, though they may not express their feelings openly. Similarly, the extrovert looks down upon the introvert as the negative type and the introvert scorns the extrovert as superficial and immature. When they work together they live in a state of mutual irritation. However, this happens perhaps when we are at the lower stages of evolution in which we are attracted towards people of a similar nature and temperament. But at a higher stage of growth, when we are more inwardly mature we are drawn towards people of complementing nature and temperament. For instance, there was mutual respect and harmony between the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, the cognitive and warrior types in ancient India. This was probably because, Brahmanas and Kshatriyas of ancient India were much more mentally and spiritually developed than their counterparts in other civilisations.

The other cause is the very common habit of trying to impose our own personal ideals on others. Each one of us has our own ideals of truth and goodness. We tend to think and feel all those who are in tune with our own ideals are good and others who are not, are not good. So, whenever we come across someone who doesn't conform to our ideals in thought, feeling, speech or behaviour it creates an inner friction. We don't realise how ridiculous it is to want others to live according to our ideals and feel irritated when they don't. We must remember that unequal diversity is a fact of life. Individuals differ in their nature, temperament, viewpoints and the level of inner development. What is good and right for a mild, gentle and peace-loving brahmana may appear as cowardice and weakness to the aggressive warrior-temperament of a kshatriya. A moral code or religious ideal which may be helpful to my progress may appear as dogmatic or restrictive to someone who is at a higher stage of spiritual development. What is felt as

offensive to my sensibilities and harmful to my progress may be pleasing and beneficial to others who are at a different stage of evolution. What I consider as truth, wisdom, balance, maturity may appear as petty and narrow to someone who has a deeper, vaster and a higher vision of life.

If we are part of a spiritual community we have common ideals given by the founders of the community. But here also each member of the community understands the ideals of his Master according to his level of inner development. He may think his own understanding as the best and judge other members of the community according to his understanding which could be very faulty or partial. We are not here justifying or condoning gross violation of ideals or fundamental human values which any one can see, like for example, lying or creating violent disturbance in the outer life of the individual or the collectivity.¹ We are trying to understand the causes of inner friction created by differences in understanding, perspectives and viewpoints.

Once we have understood clearly the causes of our likes and dislikes, the next step is to desist from converting our likes and dislikes into moral opinions and judgments. When we observe ourselves carefully we will find most of our moral judgments like good and bad, are based either on vital affinities (likes and dislikes) or mental conceptions and ideals. When we say, "he is a nice person" it means simply either we like him or he is in tune with our ideals of goodness. Similarly, when we have a strong inner dislike for a person it is like wearing a dark glass. His small defects are blown out of proportion and even his good qualities appear in a negative light. So, we must realise that all those whom we dislike are not necessarily bad and others whom we like are not always good. Someone who doesn't conform to my ideals of goodness need not be bad. Sometimes he may be very good, a better human being than me because he may be living according to a deeper and broader understanding of goodness! Remember the well-known words of Christ when men tried to throw stones at a prostitute or when people mocked at his disciples saying how could they be so stupid to follow a "winebibber" or the hostile reactions of the Pharisee when Christ asked his disciples to feast and drink and revel during the Sabbath day when according to the Jewish tradition we have to mourn and fast and remain grave? We may not outwardly throw stones at a "sinner" or nail a prophet in the cross if they do not conform to our ideals, but we may still inwardly persecute them by throwing harsh and critical judgments at them in thought and feelings. Interestingly, what is less known in the stone-throwing episode in the bible is that the Son of God, after rebuking the self-righteous mob with the famous words "Let those who have not sinned throw stones at her", says further "O Ye people who judge, I judge not".

This brings us to an inner attitude or discipline which can be helpful in tackling the inner frown. It is to feel and experience the other people around us as mirrors in which we can see our own hidden weaknesses and imperfections. As the Mother explains:

"It is rather remarkable that when we have a weakness-for example a ridiculous habit, a defect, or an imperfection - since it is more or less a part of our nature, we consider it to be very natural, it does not shock us. But as soon as we see this same weakness, this same imperfection, this same ridiculous habit in someone else, it seems quite shocking to us....

In a general and absolute way anything that shocks you in other people is the very thing you carry in yourself in a more or less veiled, more or less hidden form, though perhaps in a slightly different guise which allows you to delude yourself. And what in yourself seems inoffensive enough, becomes monstrous as soon as you see it in others. Try to experience this; it will greatly help you to change yourself."²

When we have this experience then it is perhaps easy to feel (and do) what Sri Aurobindo says in a terse aphorism:

"Examine thyself without pity, then thou wilt be more charitable and pitiful to others."³

But none of the things which we have discussed so far can eliminate entirely the inner frown. They can perhaps minimize it but cannot dissolve it. Quarrels, inner and outer, can cease entirely only with the advent of true love founded on the unity-consciousness of the spirit in which "others" are no longer others but become part of our own self. We must note here the so-called "love" of our emotional being, which is full of misunderstandings, quarrels and hurt-feelings cannot eliminate friction and bring harmony to the communal life. All that unites and leads to harmony, for example, higher emotions like goodwill, kindness, generosity, sympathy, compassion, are undoubtedly helpful as steps and stages on the way. But ultimately, only a deeper love based on the inner experience of spiritual unity can bring perfection to our communal life. As Sri Aurobindo points out with his inimitable humour:

"Love is not enough. Something more than love is necessary. Unity of consciousness is more important than love... love also leads to quarrel. Nobody quarrels more than lovers. You know the Latin proverb that each quarrel is a renewal of love. Love is a fine flower but unity of consciousness is the root" ⁴

(M.S. Srinivasan is a research associate in Sri Aurobindo Society.)

Notes and References

- 1. Here also, a spiritual seeker should desist from moral judgments and try to understand objectively the deeper causes of the event or behaviours.*
- 2. The Mother, CWM, Vol.10, p.21-22*
- 3. Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol.16, p.66*
- 4. Purani, Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo, p.626*



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The Indian tradition of literature, unique for its content as well as chronological development, ran in two lines : Mythological and Pragmatic.

Beginning with the Vedas at the dawn of civilisation the first line branched out into the Upanishads, gave way to the epics and the Mahapuranas, followed by Upapuranas and the rest.

The second line consisted of the Brihat Katha (the precursor of the Kathasaritsagara), the Jatakas and the Panchatantra, etc. They shed light on different aspects of life, on its worldly and other worldly complexities, sometimes didactic (as in the Jatakas) but more often simply expository of the various possibilities of life.

Between these two lines quietly ran a third, the treasure of tales told by the hermits, mendicants, ascetics and other mystics. Profound for psychological studies, sharp with mystic experiences, these tales of light, wit and delight remained a oral tradition for the most part.

We propose to serialise some of them, "retold by a master story teller of our time - one of the best-loved writers of India" - as the India's National Academy of Letters introduces the author, Manoj Das.



Of Truth and Lie

Manoj Das

"Who was great-Purusha or Prakriti?" was the issue on which Viresh and Sukhvir quarreled.

"Don't dangle your beard before me," said Sukhvir. "I had read in a holy book that people who have unusually long beards are stupid. Now I find that it is true!"

Viresh, alas, had cultivated a very long beard.

"Do you dare call me stupid? I will complain to the king's magistrate," said Viresh. "Be ready to accompany me there tomorrow."

At night Viresh wondered if the magistrate would not declare him stupid since according to the holy book, very long beard indicates stupidity and the magistrate, a learned man, ought to have read the holy book. Viresh decided to shorten his beard by burning the lower portion of it with the help of the tiny lamp in front of him.

The lamp was tiny, but the fire proved formidable at the touch of the highly combustible white beard. Before Viresh knew what was happening, the fire consumed his entire beard, then his eye-brows and next spread to his head and destroyed the greater part of his luxuriant hair.

Viresh was shocked. At least not to look absolutely funny, he removed the remaining few stumps and shaved his head entirely.

Next day the magistrate heard the complaint of Viresh that Sukhvir called him stupid because he had a long beard.

"But I see no beard, not even a strand of hair on you!" wondered the magistrate.

Viresh had no option but to tell how he lost all his hair.

"Sir, do you still believe that you are not stupid?" asked the magistrate.

All present in the court laughed. Sukhvir was right in his comment.

"Speaking a truth is no offence," declared the magistrate dismissing Viresh's petition.

Then he turned towards Sukhvir.

"Which is the holy book which says that a long beard is a sign of stupidity?" he asked.

Sukhvir lowered his head and smiled apologetically.

"Speaking a lie-and that too attributing it to a holy book-is an offence. You must pay a fine of fifty silver coins."

Then, the magistrate concluded, saying, "Both of you must pay a hundred silver coins each for wasting the court's time on a trivial matter."

(The comment is on the absurdity of arguments and quarrels in matters of faith of philosophy, and the snobbery that goes with it.)

(Manoj Das is an internationally known creative writer. He is the recipient of India's national recognition, the Sahitya Akademi Award and the nation's most prestigious literacy award, the Saraswati Samman. As a social commentator, his columns in India's national dailies like The Times of India, The Hindustan Times, The Hindu and The Statesman, revealing the deeper truth and the untraced aspects behind current issues, have been highly appreciated.)



SAVITRI

the Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire

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Mangesh Nadkarni

Instalment-37

In our preliminary study of Savitri, we reached the end of Canto Four of Book X in the preceding instalment and are now ready to move on to Book XI. But before we do so, it may be useful to take a closer look at the last speech of Savitri addressed to the God of Death. This is a remarkable speech in many respects and gives us an opportunity to understand Sri Aurobindo's perspective on death and what is beyond it.

This is in one sense Savitri's victory speech. Her triumph over the God of Death is now complete. Savitri has shown to her redoubtable adversary that all his disdain and contempt for her came from his ignorance of who she is; all the veils of intellectual obscurity by which he has been trying to protect his realm of half-truth have been ineffective in the presence of the integral truth that Savitri stands for. Finally, he has now seen the halo of the deity dwelling in her. And yet, notice how Savitri begins what I have called her 'victory speech'. She begins by hailing the God of Death as the 'almighty and victorious Death'.

I hail thee, almighty and victorious Death,
Thou grandiose Darkness of the Infinite.
O Void that makest room for all to be,
Hunger that gnawest at the universe
Consuming the cold remnants of the suns
And eatst the whole world with thy jaws of fire,
Waster of the energy that has made the stars,
Inconscience, carrier of the seeds of thought,
Nescience in which All-Knowledge sleeps entombed
And slowly emerges in its hollow breast
Wearing the mind's mask of bright Ignorance.
Thou art my shadow and my instrument.
I have given thee thy awful shape of dread
And thy sharp sword of terror and grief and pain
To force the soul of man to struggle for light
On the brevity of his half-conscious days.
Thou art his spur to greatness in his works,

The whip to his yearning for eternal bliss,
His poignant need of immortality.
Live, Death, awhile, be still my instrument.
One day man too shall know thy fathomless heart
Of silence and the brooding peace of Night
And grave obedience to eternal Law
And the calm inflexible pity in thy gaze.
But now, O timeless Mightiness, stand aside
And leave the path of my incarnate Force.
Relieve the radiant God from thy black mask:
Release the soul of the world called Satyavan
Freed from thy clutch of pain and ignorance
That he may stand master of life and fate,
Man's representative in the house of God,
The mate of Wisdom and the spouse of Light,
The eternal bridegroom of the eternal bride." (P.666)

To understand this speech, we need to understand how Sri Aurobindo and the Mother look upon Death. So we begin with a brief review of their perspective. While men of science have regarded Death as a predictable consequence of an increase in entropy (the degradation of matter and energy in the universe to an ultimate state of inert uniformity), men of religion have generally looked upon it as a resting place in the passage to a higher world beyond the terrestrial. The spiritual work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has for its goal the establishment of a race of gnostic beings consequent upon the full manifestation of the supramental consciousness here on earth, and they regard victory over death in the conditions of earthly life as the goal of their integral yoga. Thus Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been revolutionary even in their thinking on Death as they have been in everything else. Let me begin by presenting to you an excerpt from Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*:

This then is the necessity and justification of Death, not as a denial of Life, but as a process of Life: death is necessary because eternal change of form is the sole immortality to which the finite living substance can aspire and eternal change of experience the sole infinity to which the finite mind involved in living body can attain. This change of form cannot be allowed to remain merely a constant renewal of the same form-type such as constitutes our bodily life between birth and death; for unless the form-type is changed and the experiencing mind is thrown into new forms in new circumstances of time, place and environment, the necessary variation of experience which the very nature of existence in Time and Space demands, cannot be effectuated. And it is only the process of Death by dissolution and by the devouring of life by life, it is only the absence of freedom, the compulsion, the struggle, the pain, the subjection to something that appears to be Not-Self which makes the necessary and salutary change appear terrible and undesirable to our mortal mentality. It is the sense of being devoured, broken up, destroyed or forced away which is the sting of Death and which even the belief in personal survival of death cannot wholly abrogate. (SABCL: 18:193-194)

The first point Sri Aurobindo makes here is that Death has no separate or intrinsic reality; it exists for the sole purpose of serving life. Death is a process and phase of life itself and, as he says elsewhere, life and not death is the fundamental all-pervading truth of existence. In Thoughts and Aphorisms, he casts the same insight in another form:

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

If Life alone were and not death, there would be no immortality Death transformed becomes Life that is Immortality."

The death of the body is really an instrument which serves the interests of perpetually evolving life. Then he goes on to point out that the eternal change of form is the only immortality to which the finite living substance can aspire, and eternal change of experience in terms of new circumstance of time, place and space the sole infinity to which the finite mind involved in time can attain. All life is a journey from the Inconscient to the Superconscient (Divinity). Such a long journey cannot be completed within the span of one life. By the time an individual attains to what is called as old age, say eighty-five or ninety years or so, most of his physical faculties lose their keenness and capacity to experience life. If he continues this way much longer, in most cases he is reduced to a vegetable existence. In such a situation death comes as a gateway through which the soul enters again in a new and young body full of verve and the enthusiasm to experience life. Besides, when the individual is reborn, he takes birth in new circumstances of time, place and space. This gives the soul scope for a wider and more diversified experience of life, best suited for its further growth. This then is the utility of death; it is not a denial but a process of life.

In his great epic poem Savitri too, Death is seen not as an eternal opposite of the Light, but is seen as an instrument of evolution:

Although Death walks beside us on Life's road,
A dim bystander at the body's start
And a last judgment on man's futile works,
Other is the riddle of its ambiguous face:
Death is a stair, a door, a stumbling stride
The soul must take to cross from birth to birth,
A grey defeat pregnant with victory,
A whip to lash us towards our deathless state. (pp.: 600-601)

Thus in Sri Aurobindo's vision Death has a meaning and purpose and Savitri calls him God:

O Death, thou art God and yet not He,
But only his own black shadow on his path
As leaving the Night he takes the upward Way
And drags with him its clinging inconscient Force. (P: 656)

In Thoughts and Aphorisms , the service that death performs to life is succinctly put in these words:

Death is a question Nature puts continually to Life and her reminder to her that it has not yet found itself. If there were no siege of death, the creature would be found for ever in the form of an imperfect living. Pursued by death he awakes to the idea of perfect life and seeks out its means and its possibility.

Savitri hails Death as "victorious Death" at the beginning of her final speech because Death has finally succeeded in awakening man to the possibility of a perfect life and to seek out its means and its possibility. Death's success lies in ultimately making a human being so perfect that death itself would have no place in such a life. Savitri has incarnated that possibility in her life now, and since an Avatar comes to set an example for others to follow, other human beings also will now begin to realise this possibility in their lives.

But there is a catch here. Victory over death, which is the ultimate goal of the Integral Yoga, might look like a most materialistic ideal for a spiritual enterprise, unless the phrase is understood properly. This seeking after physical immortality is in no way related to our blind and egoistic attachment to body and physical life.

As for immortality, it cannot come if there is attachment to the body, for it is only by living in the immortal part of oneself which is unidentifed with the body and bringing down its consciousness and force into the cells that it can come (Letter on Yoga; 1234)

Secondly, it is incumbent upon every sadhak of integral yoga that he gives up the fear of death and the disgust for bodily cessation. The Mother has written most insightfully on how to get rid of the fear of death. The principle way is to grow in the consciousness of the immortality of the soul.

By immortality, spiritual adepts do not mean some kind of personal survival after the dissolution of the body; they mean by it the consciousness which the Gita describes as follows:

Na jaayate mriyate vaa kadaachit naayam bhuutvaa bhavita vaa na bhuuyah
Ajo nityah shashvato^yam puraaNo na hanyate hanyamaane shariire (2.20)

"This is not born, nor does it die, nor is it a thing that comes into being once and passing away will never come into being again. It is unborn, ancient, sempiternal; it is not slain with the slaying of the body."

The Gita also describes it as "avinaashinam. Nityam, ajam avyayam" (unborn, immutable and imperishable), which the weapons cannot cleave, nor the fire burn, nor do the waters drench nor the wind dry".

This is a consciousness which is beyond all bondage and limitation, free, blissful. self-existent in conscious being, the consciousness of the Lord, the supreme Purusha, of

Satchidananda. This experience of the soul needs no external proof to anyone who has experienced it. It can only be acquired as a result of the elevation and widening of our consciousness through spiritual sadhana.

In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo speaks of two kinds of immortality, the timeless immortality of the soul, and time-immortality. By the latter is meant the knowledge of self in the birth and becoming, and a sense of persistent identity of the soul through all the changes of mind, life and body. In almost all spiritual disciplines, the double realisation of timeless immortality and time-immortality leads the sadhak to withdraw from the field of terrestrial becoming. He seeks the Nirvanic extinction from what he regards as the vain cycle births and death.

The sadhak of the Integral Yoga does not entertain an attitude of world-disgust; he aspires to transcend death in order that life may be divinely fulfilled. This Becoming, which we call creation, is progressive and evolutionary. It began with the big bang and is gradually evolving towards the Super-consciousness. The present condition of life cannot be the last act of the evolutionary drama since it is afflicted with suffering and death. Death has to be conquered as a sign of Being's victory in the field of Becoming. It means, as Sri Aurobindo explained in a letter, that "[the body] would no longer be subject to decay and disease. That would mean it would not be subject to the ordinary processes by which death comes. If a change of body has to be made, it would have to be by the will of the inhabitant. This (not the obligation to live 3000 years, for that too would be bondage) would be the essence of physical immortality." (*Letters on Yoga*: 1231) But for this to happen, Sri Aurobindo mentions in the same letter, a dynamic action of the Truth is necessary in mind, vital and body and for such a dynamic action, the supramental descent is necessary.

We cannot enter here into a discussion of why the descent of the supramental consciousness is necessary, and of why Sri Aurobindo thinks that such a descent is inevitable. It is indeed as a result of our transformation that we arrive at a higher and higher manifestation of consciousness in our evolutionary journey. "As Nature has evolved beyond Matter and manifested Life, beyond Life and manifested Mind, so she must evolve beyond Mind and manifest a consciousness and power of our existence free from the imperfection and limitation of our mental existence, a supramental or truth-consciousness and able to develop the power and perfection of the spirit.... Light and bliss and beauty and a perfection of the spontaneous right action of all the being are there as native powers of the supramental truth-consciousness and these will in their very nature transform mind and life and body even here upon earth into a manifestation of the truth-conscious spirit. The obscuration of earth will not prevail against the supramental truth-consciousness, for even into the earth it can bring enough of the omniscient light and omnipotent force of the spirit to conquer. All may not open to the fullness of its light and power, but whatever does open must to that extent undergo the change. That will be the principle of transformation." (*The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth in SABCL Vol. 16*: pages 20-21)

Many people, including some spiritual adepts, have observed that people undertaking the pursuit of Yoga happen to suffer from some disabilities of the body which would not have befallen them under normal circumstances. It is also true that we have testimony from Yogis who have cured themselves of illnesses and have even succeeded in repelling a predestined death for a long period. The Mother has shed a flood of light on this entire phenomenon. She has explained the factors which ordinarily lead to progressive breakdown in health and ultimately to its dissolution in death.

According to her the whole creation is evolving towards perfection. Now if one takes up Yoga, this force gets accelerated in him. But it is only his inner consciousness that obeys this accelerating impulse because the higher parts of one's being are subtler, and therefore more responsive to this force and much more easily adapt themselves and adjust themselves to the demands of this force than the body, which is pathetic in its ineptness in this respect. The material nature is rigid and there the transformation is slow, too slow for the human consciousness to be able to perceive it. The body thus gets left behind and this creates a disharmony in the nature, between the inner and the outer and the system translates it into illness. That is why people who take up Yoga tend to fall ill frequently. When this lack of balance beyond a point, the disintegration and change of form becomes necessary.

But according to the Mother, this necessity is not an abiding one, nor is its nature intrinsic and irrevocable. In fact, she thinks that it is wholly fortuitous and may very well be remedied. If the whole being could simultaneously advance in the progressive transformation, there would be no illness, no death. But it will have to be the whole being, from the highest to the most material, which is by nature rigid and averse to any change. We should be able to infuse into this matter sufficient consciousness so that it can fall in line with the subtler parts and becomes plastic enough to follow the inner progress. When this happens, death would no more be necessary.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have assured us that if proper conditions for it can be created death can be done away with. This does not seem to be such a fanciful idea if one were to examine this issue even in the light of the scientific evidence currently available. In his *Destiny of the Body*, Jugal Kishore Mukherjee presents enough biological evidence which suggests that "neither senescence nor natural death is a necessary, inevitable consequence or attribute of life. Natural death is biologically a relatively new thing, which made its appearance only after the living organism had advanced a long way on the path of evolution." (Quotation from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

Undoubtedly death has served life well in many ways. Death has spurred life to persuade her to evolve progressively higher and higher forms of existence. From a practical point of view, the dispensation of a natural death comes as a boon to individuals who live in an ego-bound consciousness. It saves us from the tedium of living in a never-ending now. Without death, there would have been no secure permanence for any species because then there would be no opportunity for a species to renovate and vitalise itself through the introduction of younger and more robust individuals replacing the worn-out ones.

I would like to close with a few observations on this problem made by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The real cause of death is not physical. Sri Aurobindo observes in an interesting footnote in *The Life Divine* (page 822) as follows:

Even if Science - physical Science or occult Science - were to discover the necessary condition or means for an infinite survival of the body, still, if the body could not adapt itself to so as to become a fit instrument of expression for the inner growth, the soul would find some way to abandon it and pass on to a new incarnation. The material or physical causes of death are not its sole or its true cause; its true inmost reason is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being."

In Integral Yoga, the aim is not to keep the same physical body forever. What is sought to be achieved is the elimination of the elements of inevitability and forceful dissolution in the process of death, a complete freedom from the attacks of illness and the power to prolong life at will. But this can be achieved through the power of Yoga. The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother aims at the supramental transformation of our limited and rigid existence down to the very cells of the material body and enable our earthly life to flower into the immortal Life Divine.

Before I conclude this discussion, I would like to draw your attention to another interesting line in this speech of Savitri to the God of Death. The first several lines of this passage describe the several roles Death has played in the evolutionary saga of this creation; we are told that Death has been given its various forms to hasten man's evolution towards "greatness in his works, the whip to his yearning for eternal bliss, his poignant need of immortality." But then comes this most puzzling line. Savitri has defeated Death, and yet she says, "Live, Death, awhile, be still my instrument." Is it possible that Savitri suggests that although she has individually triumphed over death, she would like Death to continue to do the evolutionary work of preparing the whole of mankind for immortality?

(Mangesh Nadkarni retired as professor of Linguistics a few years ago. He enjoys sharing with as many people as possible what he receives from his study of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother)



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Light and Shadow - Intensification on the Path

The Mother

When you represent the possibility of a victory, you always have within you the thing contrary to this victory, which is your perpetual trouble.

Each one has his own difficulty. And I have given the example already once, I think. For instance, a being who must represent fearlessness, courage, you know, a capacity to hold on without giving way before all dangers and all fights, usually somewhere in his being he is a terrible coward, and he has to struggle against this almost constantly because this represents the victory he has to win in the world.

It is like a being who ought to be good, full of compassion and generosity; somewhere in his being he is sharp, sour and sometimes even bad; and he has to struggle against this in order to be the other thing. And so on. It goes into all the details. It's like that.

And when you see a very black shadow somewhere, very black, something that's truly painful, you know, you can be sure that you have in you the possibility of the corresponding light....

In life you are unconscious, you pass all your life in an absolutely vague semi-consciousness, you know nothing about yourself, except just an appearance, nothing more. And you will always be incapable of fulfilling your mission and therefore you do not meet the obstacle in the heart of the difficulty, only an appearance; you are all in the midst of appearances. It's simply that. So your faults are small, your virtues are small, your capacities are mediocre and your difficulties are mediocre, you are entirely mediocre, constantly.

It is only when you begin to walk on the path of Realisation that your possibilities become real, and your difficulties become much greater-quite naturally. Things become intensified.

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Shiva



Shiva leaning lovingly on his bull Nandi. Arjuna Ratha, Mamallapuram, Pallava, seventh century. Photograph by Elizabeth Beck.